いちばんうしろの
大魔王
ACT5
水城正太郎

いちばんうしろの
大魔王
ACT5

「ふん……それもいいか」
阿九斗がつぶやくと、それが合図だったかのように、無数の巫女たちが一斉にピーターハウゼンに襲いかかった。

「どうしてこんなことになったの？」
けーなは聞いた。
「それは難しい問いよ。本当に難しいわ」

登場人物紹介

紗伊阿九斗
将来「魔王」になると予言された「善良な」主人公。膨大な魔力を有するが融通が利かない。
曽我けーな
落ちこぼれな天然少女。阿九斗に懐いている。物語の鍵を握る人物？
大和望一郎
内閣魔術情報調査室のトップ。何故か100年前から姿が変わっていない。神に対する立場の違いから阿九斗と対立する。
江藤不二子
阿九斗に忠誠を誓った黒魔術師にして薬物使い。阿九斗たちの先輩で女子寮長を勤める。

服部絢子（はっとりじゅんこ）
阿九斗のことが気になる一途で純情なクラス委員長。伊賀出身の忍者娘。
リリィ白石（しらいし）
コンスタン魔術学院生徒会長。帽子がトレードマーク。阿九斗と魔王の件に関して独自路線を歩む。
学院長（がくいんちょう）
コンスタン魔術学院の学院長。謎多き老人。魔王が起こした前大戦の経験者。
三輪寛（みわひろし）
阿九斗の弟分を名乗るトラブルメイカー。伝説の勇者という顔も持つ。
ピーターハウゼン
前代の魔王に仕えた全長15メートルの黒竜。阿九斗を主と認め、その騎竜となる。
ころね
阿九斗の監視と護衛を行なう人造人間。ポシェットから秘密な道具を取り出し使用する。

Prologue

From his own perspective, Yamato Bouichirou had already lived for hundreds of years. He would appear and disappear within many different eras, but he experienced disappointment in every one of them.

Those disappointments had made him stronger, but they had also made him stubborn. This was caused by his own inability to resolve the contradiction that existed at the base of his heart. No matter how many years or centuries he spent, he could not resolve that contradiction.

Once, far in the future from the era Akuto and the others live in, Bouichirou had worked in a university research laboratory and had been taught information integration science there. This was before he became a time traveler, so it was the very first era of his life.

"If a certain race has inferior intelligence, it is proper that the superior race guides them."

Those words had been spoken by Sudou Rimu, Bouichirou's guidance teacher.

"You can't mean that!"

Bouichirou's disgust reflexively came to the surface. Racial discrimination was a detestable practice of the past. The system of slavery which had caused so much suffering for so long had certainly been based in the reasoning that those races which had achieved civilization were superior to those which had not. It was a disgusting way of thinking.

But Rimu shook her head with an expression saying that she had predicted his reaction. A hint of disappointment was visible in her eyes. Bouichirou's shoulder's drooped when he saw that expression.

"What kind of cruelty is this?"

While in the research laboratory, Rimu would act as his guidance teacher rather than his lover. And to ensure Bouichirou kept that in mind, she would occasionally ask him cruel questions.

"No. It is not all that cruel."

As she spoke, Rimu let out an obvious sigh. She was a genius in the field of information integration science and her appearance was without fault. But she held such faith in reason that she did not even attempt to hide her

scorn for those who took actions based on emotion. That was her one obvious flaw.

"So even you give that response. But think about it. Those words are absolutely correct in and of themselves," said Rimu in admonition.

"I see," said Bouichirou with a nod. "From a scholarly perspective, I suppose so."

"But when you try to apply it to reality, you suddenly cannot accept it. If an intelligence greater than mankind did exist, who would accept that?"

"Why are you bringing this up?" replied Bouichirou because he could not grasp her intention.

Rimu replied with a much more serious expression than he had expected.

"Because mankind will be destroyed."

"Sigh. I regret the fact that I know you too well to think you would be joking," said Bouichirou while doing the best he could not grow too serious.

However, Rimu's serious expression remained. This terrified Bouichirou even more.

"Destroyed? Are you speaking figuratively? Or…"

"I mean it literally," declared Rimu.

Bouichirou looked around the laboratory. No one was around to hear them speak. Rimu had clearly chosen this moment.

"Is this a topic you cannot allow to get out?" asked Bouichirou with a gulp.

Rimu nodded as if to say, "So you're finally catching on."

"Yes, of course. Only you would think I was sane if I said this. If we do not reach the final battle, mankind will be annihilated by a certain individual."

"That is complete nonsense," replied Bouichirou reflexively, but he then spoke back to Rimu to calm himself down. "You are the one that created the foundational principles for the weapon to defeat the demon king. Thanks to that, we can immediately eliminate any demon king that appears from now on. So why will mankind be annihilated if we do not reach the final battle?"

"The theology supporting my research was fundamentally flawed. That is why a new demon king is born no matter how many times the demon king is defeated."

"Flawed?"

"Yes. The gods already have a will of their own. We have misread the situation. And have done so for hundreds of years."

"So are you saying the gods will destroy mankind…? No, you said it would be a certain individual…"

"Yes. It will not be the mechanized gods that are no more than a system created by mankind. There may be a real god. The gods of antiquity. The being called god when mankind first created religion. You could call it the God of the Old Planet."

Rimu's words sent Bouichirou into an indescribable state of confusion. She was saying a real god might exist. And she was saying it would destroy mankind.

Bouichirou was left completely speechless, so Rimu gave a resigned smile.

"Is that really your reaction? But… <Our mechanized gods used intelligence several levels above our own with reasoning we cannot understand to determine that most of mankind must die to save mankind.> That is my thought."

Bouichirou was not someone who would not understand the situation after hearing that much. He was filled with fear when he thought about what would happen if that was true.

"So that is why you asked that first question!"

"Yes. Logically correct statements can lead to emotional backlash. 'War can be justified.' 'White people are cowards.' Mankind has definitely been given an abundant lifestyle to stop saying that sort of thing. But what if that is not what mankind was born to do?"

"Are you saying humans were born to discriminate and slaughter each other?"

"Perhaps. The god that created mankind is trying to destroy mankind and the mechanized gods we have created are trying to save mankind from that."

Rimu's worldview caused Bouichirou to hold his head in his hands. He could not decide whether she was right or not.

"D-do you have any proof?" he asked.

It would be a lot better if Rimu were simply insane. But Rimu calmly shook her head.

"As is often the case in information integration science, I can only speak philosophically. However, the reason certain types of animals do not hesitate to kill other animals is because they are as identical to their surroundings as a drop of water in a pool of water. The only creatures that resist becoming one with nature in that way are those with great intelligence such as us. You could say I believe intelligence is the same as being in opposition to becoming one with nature like that. However, the gods we created are the same as nature while still possessing great intelligence."

"Then this idea of mankind being destroyed…?"

"Yes. I heard about it directly from the gods. I spoke with a shrine maiden of Suhara. No one had asked the right questions, so the answer had never been arrived at before. That is how it was hidden for hundreds of years. The reason a demon king is born and the reason we are driven to war have both been kept hidden for so long."

"I cannot bring myself to believe this. It is possible you are being deceived. Why would mankind's numbers need to be lowered in order to save it? It makes no sense."

Rimu's shoulders drooped in resignation when she heard Bouichirou's opinion.

"This is where you have no taste at all. But there is no time, so think about it on your own. However, I do have proof that the God of the Old Planet exists. We constantly use mana to transfer ourselves through space, but why can we not pass through time? We cannot break the barrier of time with technology that uses mana. In other words, we cannot interfere with the dimension itself. And yet we can transfer through space. That is a contradiction. The reason for this is the Law of Identity. We cannot help but think that we are ourselves. That is the source of our intelligence as living beings. And that was created by the God of the Old Planet," said Rimu. She shook her head in disappointment when she saw Bouichirou clearly still did not understand. "You do not need to believe me. I will leave you a

chance to research. Once you complete that, you may come to understand what I mean." Rimu displayed a mana gauge and showed it to Bouichirou. "This is the inherent vibration of my mana. If you use this, you can overcome the barrier of time."

"What? That's-…"

Bouichirou swallowed the word "ridiculous", but he still began wondering if Rimu truly was insane. Just as Rimu herself had said, the ability to travel through time had been researched for a long time but had produced nothing but failures.

"You will see once you try it. It will work because I am the Law of Identity."

Rimu smiled gently as she spoke.

Bouichirou could not come up with anything to say in response. He simply said, "I will research it."

"You must not publicly announce anything you heard here. The ability to travel through time must remain a secret until it is complete. I will come to see your results periodically." Rimu began to leave the lab but turned around at the last second. "What do you think would happen to me if I publicly announced this?"

She was still smiling, but she looked somehow sad.

Bouichirou understood the meaning of that expression. Rimu would be deemed insane. No one would believe what she said and she would certainly be imprisoned if she took action to carry out this dream of hers.

Bouichirou felt Rimu's smile came from despair. And he could only think that despair came from his reaction. Rimu desired a comrade who thought the same as she did. And he had been unable to think that way until receiving her explanation. Most likely, he was no different from the majority of people.

"W-wait…"

Bouichirou tried to stop her, but Rimu left without replying.

Bouichirou never saw Rimu again. She had said she would periodically come by to see his results, but she had taken action to support the demon king shortly after leaving.

Bouichirou had been unable to heal her despair. He had immersed himself in his research as if to ensure he still had that small connection to her. He ultimately developed technology to control time and space, but he realized he would never have a chance to save Rimu when he learned he could not return to a time he had already existed in once. On top of that, the instant he had used the technology he developed had been the exact instant of mankind's destruction.

Whenever Bouichirou closed his eyes, he saw that unforgettable scene in the back of his mind.

A mysterious eddy rose up in the dark red sky. A giant and ominous existence that defied description existed within that eddy. The tens of thousands of troops in the demon king's army drew a spiral around that eddy. The transformed demon king stood at the front of that army. And next to him was Rimu.

This apocalyptic and majestic scene seemed to split Bouichirou's body between the puny mental images of having betrayed his lover's trust and being betrayed by his lover. If possible, he had wanted to take his own life. However, Bouichirou had understood that he would become the last of mankind. During his research, he had become certain that the God of the Old Planet intended to destroy mankind.

Bouichirou needed to flee. He became mankind's lone time traveler and was the only one who could change the situation.

And afterwards, Bouichirou remained mankind's lone time traveler and he experienced despair for a long, long time.

Chapter 1: Chaos from the Beginning

A military force of 3700 surrounded the demonic castle that had once been Constant Magic Academy. The flying aircraft carrier Genkaku was also present. Even with the great numbers of demonic beasts enveloping the school building itself, they should have been able to take control of the situation with little resistance. However, the demon king Sai Akuto's presence changed that.

Teruya Eiko looked out over the school building and schoolyard from the tent she was commanding from. The schoolyard was covered by the 600 Iga ninja commanded by Hattori Junko and the 1200-man regiment of imperial army infantry. This gave her a total of 1800 troops there. The plan was for them to hunt the demonic beasts surrounding the school building and create an opening to charge through.

But Eiko's plan quickly failed. A metal stake carved with a spiral was fired from underground, creating a hole. The infantry were just about ready to flee when they saw Akuto and the black dragon Peterhausen fly up out of that hole.

"Young lady, what are your instructions!?"

The regiment commander's voice reached Eiko through her telepathic communicator.

"Do not call me young lady! I am the head of the family! Instructions? What else are you to do besides intercept the demon king!?" Eiko shouted back into the telepathic communicator.

But then she felt a presence behind her and turned around.

She had been standing alone in front of the map in the command tent, but a man in a suit had appeared at some point.

Eiko clicked her tongue. He was the Cabinet Intelligence and Magic Office agent who had been loitering around the tent since the beginning of Operation Battering Ram. And he was one of CIMO 8 who were under Yamato Bouichirou's direct control.

And of all things, he spoke into the telepathic communicator.

"The demon king is a more lenient man than he looks. He naively refuses to attack those who flee and refuses to actively try to kill. Keep your distance and fight so as to provoke him."

"…Wha-!?"

Eiko was dumbfounded. She ended the telepathic connection and immediately turned around. She turned the characteristic intimidating glare of the Teruya family toward the man, but he remained composed.

He looked to be in his thirties. He gave a flippant impression yet he had no distinguishing visual characteristics. One would easily believe he was a salaryman. There was no hiding his well-proportioned build, but the suit he wore hid just how much muscle he had. Every member of CIMO 8 was supposedly an expert in magical combat, but he did not look it.

"You told me I could do this however I wanted!" shouted Eiko angrily.

The man laughed in response.

"My apologies. I merely thought I would provide some help with the information I had gathered. Specifically, I have gathered information on the demon king's personality. I thought you might want to tailor your commands in accordance with that information."

Eiko was at a loss for words. She glanced over at the state of the battle. It appeared the demon king and the black dragon were having a bit of difficulty handling the infantry's more passive strategy. After he would easily blow away a few of the soldiers on the ground, he would spend an even longer time circling around in the air above.

"…I will take it into consideration. What is your name?"

In response, the man made the V-sign with both hands. Eiko's eyebrows rose at that ridiculous gesture.

"Damn you! Are you mocking me!?"

"2V. That is my codename. Nice to meet you, beautiful. Ha ha."

Once Eiko's anger had receded once more, 2V began moving the units on the map that indicated the different military forces.

"Your objective is the annihilation of the demonic beasts and the capture or death of the demon king, correct? However, the situation has changed."

"I-I intended to have the infantry handle things individually to buy enough time to send in the aircraft carrier," said Eiko, but 2V continued speaking as if ignoring her.

"An attack with the aircraft carrier would greatly damage the academy. This is being broadcast to the entire country and we cannot allow public opinion of the military to drop. It would be best to have your soldiers hunt down the demon king. Am I wrong?"

"I-I know that!"

"I apologize in advance, but the arrangement of your troops shows several bad habits of a novice commander. Have you forgotten that magical combat spreads out in all three dimensions? That black dragon is flying. The infantry provoking him are walking. The troops that can oppose him are the airborne battalion carried within the aircraft carrier. You were planning to have them rush into the school if it came down to it, weren't you? That is not how magical combat works. Use your unit that can fly to three-dimensionally handle your flying enemy."

Eiko could only remain silent when faced with this lecture. 2V waved his hands to tell her to calm down.

"Do not worry. You have command. I am merely supplying information. For example, it seems there is a device within the school that is controlling the demonic beasts. You will find victory much easier if you make destroying that your objective. If you destroy it, control of the demonic beasts will be lost when the demon king is far enough away," said 2V confidently.

Eiko was skeptical. Official military intelligence was not aware of this demonic beast controller. But 2V must have read that skepticism on her face because he spoke as if to preemptively answer her question.

"This is information we have gathered on our own. We are an intelligence office, after all. And no offense to military intelligence, but we are more skilled than your average intelligence agency."

"Can I trust you?" asked Eiko.

"Of course," replied 2V with a smile.

"You say there is a demonic beast controller?"

"Yes. Now, how about we change the strategy to one intended to destroy it?"

2V stretched a hand out toward the map, but Eiko grabbed that hand.

"I am the one who decides on the strategy. You just need to give me what information you have. And you are going to take whatever actions you want, right? Then do so."

"As you wish," said 2V while drawing his head back in an exaggerated gesture of fear.

"A controller?" asked Lily Shiraishi, the short student council president who wore a stylish hat.

Standing before her was a three-headed Cerberus demonic beast ridden by Etou Fujiko and Soga Keena.

"That is correct. I call it the altar."

Fujiko's long hair fluttered as she turned around. Instead of her school uniform, she wore an extreme bondage-style outfit. It seemed to be her image of what one accompanying the demon king should wear. However, she was beautiful enough to pull off that wicked woman look.

"That outfit is against school rules. And on top of that, you created a demonic beast controller at school? Are you trying to pick a fight with me?"

There was a world of difference between violating the dress code and controlling demonic beasts, but that short girl with not much of a figure seemed to view them as equal crimes. Lily stared back at Fujiko with a hostile look in her eyes.

Fujiko laughed.

"Ho ho ho. Of course not! The altar is for Akuto-sama. Akuto-sama is much more just and powerful than the school. You could not put up enough resistance to even call it a fight."

The look in Lily's eyes changed to a murderous one.

"Hm? If I get a little carried away, I might take you out along with him."

"C'mon, don't fight. The headmaster is doing his best, remember?" warned Keena.

"I did not think I would hear that from you."

Fujiko had been about to make some reply, but Keena's comment must have taken the poison out of her mood. The same seemed to have happened to Lily.

"We can leave the details until later. For now, where is this altar?"

Fujiko answered Lily's question by pointing forward.

The three of them were headed toward the demon king's palace located in the deepest depths of Constant Magic Academy. They continued even farther in until they reached the place where the demonic beasts had been sealed.

"The demonic beasts are controlled using Akuto-sama's unique mana waves, but they go on a rampage when he is too far away or his mind is not in a stable state. That is why I created a device that outputs stable mana waves."

The passageway opened up into a small room. Fujiko climbed down from the Cerberus and pointed to the center of the room. A black magic altar decorated with skulls and dragons was placed there. It was about the perfect size for a single human to stand in front of it and perform a ritual. It was a venomous-looking object with a primarily red and black coloration.

"That's some taste you've got there," said Lily with a grimace, but Fujiko did not mind.

"Thank you. The mechanism is actually quite simple, but I put a lot of effort into its appearance."

"Simple, hm? I suppose it is the jar-shaped thing in the center that's actually emitting the waves. But I thought it was impossible for a human's unique mana waves to be reproduced by anything but that person's own body."

That question brought an ecstatic look to Fujiko's face.

"It was not easy cultivating a portion of Akuto-sama's body until it would produce those waves."

"Eh? From what I heard, you didn't have enough time to cultivate anything from the time you decided to make this altar to the time you completed it."

Lily looked surprised, but for some reason, Fujiko embarrassedly brought a hand to her cheek and gave no answer.

"A-anyway, if you do not protect this, your loss is unavoidable," said Lily after clearing her throat.

"Yes. I must protect this altar with my life."

Fujiko spread her arms and opened a mana screen that displayed a map of the area around the school.

"Just protect it? That isn't going to cut it," said Lily.

Fujiko placed her hands on her hips and gave a fearless smile.

"Akuto-sama said he would kill the gods. It is only natural that I obey him. And I will not merely be protecting it. Fortunately, this is being broadcast nationwide. If the military is completely decimated by the demonic beasts here, it will give courage to the black magicians across the country!"

"You sure are optimistic. And in that case, I am your enemy."

"My enemy? I thought protecting the school was the student council president's job."

"Are you an idiot? I will not be fighting as the demon king's ally. I came with you to see what you were doing," said Lily angrily.

"In that case, you need not worry. I will do nothing to get in your way, president. And I believe we have a common enemy at the moment."

"Teruya Eiko, you mean? I know what she did. The surveillance cameras just barely caught it. I have proof, but she's probably planning on eliminating all of us."

"Yes, but I have an idea as to how to fight her. If you intend to head out and fight that army, feel free."

"Are you saying you have a plan?" asked Lily since Fujiko was acting so confidently.

"Of course I do. The demonic beasts are under my command. Their teamwork is perfect. And I know exactly how a coward like Teruya Eiko thinks."

"Is that because you're a coward, too?" asked Lily sarcastically, but Fujiko nodded with a huge smile on her face.

"To a black magician, being called cowardly or a user of makeshift methods are the greatest compliments! Teruya Eiko will send her forces in bit by bit out of fear that we will self destruct."

Lily shrugged in annoyance, but then asked a question because Fujiko had touched on the issue of strategy.

"Self destruct?"

"If you do not count the demonic beasts, we are no more than a few students. If the entire enemy force charged in at once, we could destroy the school building with them all inside. She will fear that first and foremost."

"I see."

"And so she will only send her forces in bit by bit. That provides us with plenty of openings to take advantage of."

Fujiko looked like she was about to begin laughing loudly, but Lily cut her off with a question.

"But that's only if Teruya Eiko is in command, right?"

"Eh? Of course she will be in command. Does she look like the type that would hand command over to someone else?"

"No, but I've been investigating CIMO 8 and I've learned that someone with the codename 2V is with her."

This time, Fujiko asked a question because Lily's tone hinted at some further meaning to her comment.

"2V?"

"He's a specialist in controlling automata. And it seems he's an excellent strategist."

"How is that a problem?"

"If you're that confident, I guess that's fine. But I doubt he is thinking the same thing Teruya Eiko is. If he has some other purpose here, the situation may not progress as you think it will."

Lily's tone was strong, but Fujiko did not seem to be taking her seriously.

"Thank you very much. I will take that into consideration."

"Is that all? Well, do as you wish."

Lily moved away from the altar and began to leave the room.

When Keena saw that, she spoke to Lily.

"You're leaving?"

"The headmaster bought this time for us. I am going to use it in the most effective way I can," replied Lily without turning around.

Several blows had already been exchanged in the confrontation between headmaster in question and Yamato Bouichirou. Bouichirou was holding the giant sword that had blown away even Akuto. The reason he had been forced to use even that sword several times was because the headmaster was giving him no opening.

The headmaster's upper body was bare, but his muscles were constantly undulating without a moment of negligence. His arms were gently rotating around each other in front of his body.

Anyone who knew the headmaster would have found this view of him unbelievable. He had been an old man who looked like a dried-up old tree, but now his exposed upper body was enveloped in tremendous amounts of muscle. This was the ultimate form of manipulating the body with transformation magic.

"Why are you blocking my way?" asked Bouichirou in a harsh voice.

This portion of the academy's underground passageways had only a single path, so he could not advance without defeating the headmaster.

"I have changed over the past hundred years."

The headmaster laughed with a light, youthful voice.

"Before, I fought alongside you to defeat the demon king," pointed out Bouichirou.

"That was with the previous demon king."

"Then why? Why do you block my path when you know my objective?"

"I have not forgotten your objective. But my way of thinking has changed over the years. I thought defeating the demon king was the correct path back then."

"And now you do not? But nothing has changed."

"That is true. But is that not because we failed to do a good job? We defeated the previous demon king. And yet you are here now. Does that not mean that the future was not changed?"

Bouichirou's expression said those words had hit him where it hurt.

"B-but I did not know what the Law of Identity was back then!" protested Bouichirou.

Bouichirou vanished in the next instant. He had charged forward with tremendous speed. In an instant, he travelled to a point directly in front of headmaster and stopped there. However, he let momentum carry the sword in his hands such that it stabbed toward the headmaster. The tip of the sword broke the sound barrier and a great bursting noise shook the area.

The headmaster could not avoid this attack. If he did, he would be allowing Bouichirou past. However, he would be blown away if he took the attack head on. This was an attack that had blown away even Akuto.

What the headmaster did was nothing more than making one quick exhalation and increasing the speed of the arms rotating in front of his body.

Those arms moved as if sticking to the center of the blade. The rotation of the headmaster's arms knocked the giant sword off of its path.

"Tch!"

Bouichirou was unable to correct the path of the deflected sword and the tip stabbed deep into the wall. The sword stopped in the wall, but Bouichirou was forced to jump back or else expose his defenseless body to the headmaster.

The two were facing each other from the same distance as before.

There were a few holes in the school wall caused by that sword. The reason they had repeatedly exchanged blows yet the situation had not changed was that this same exchange occurred each time.

The headmaster did not attack Bouichirou, so nothing happened besides the passage of time.

"Are you not attacking me in order to buy time?"

"You may imagine whatever reason you wish. However, the real reason is that this Kakei[1] is most suited to this old body of mine."

"Either way, it prevents either of us from moving. And the situation is growing worse for me. I had not wanted to kill my old friend. I had actually wanted to speak with you, but you leave me no choice. Please do not hold a grudge if I end up killing you." Bouichirou slightly adjusted his grip on the sword. "I will be slicing through the dimension itself. This is the Hodgson-style perfect slice."

Bouichirou swung his sword as he spoke and empty space was sliced apart along the path of its tip as if that space was made of gelatin. And that slice shot toward the headmaster at tremendous speed.

Slicing through space itself was a technique that allowed one to cut through anything. That was what Bouichirou had used to cut off Akuto's arm. The headmaster was of course unable to deflect this with the rotation of his arms.

The dimensional slice touched the headmaster's body.

However, the headmaster continued to stand with an unconcerned look on his face. The slice passed through him and continued on the other side. Nothing happened to his body.

"What…?"

Bouichirou's eyebrows rose slightly.

He fired another Hodgson-style perfect slice, but the sliced space passed straight through the headmaster once more.

"How? Is this just an image?"

Bouichirou sliced through space once more and charged forward after it. He swung his sword down along the same path as the slice in space.

The headmaster did not dodge the slice in space yet still deflected the sword with the rotation of his arms.

"How?"

Bouichirou jumped back once more.

"How I did it is a secret. You need little tricks like this if you are going to live as long as I have. Oh, but I suppose you have lived longer than me… Now then, old friend. How about we talk? Once you reach my age, you do not often find people to speak about old times with."

The headmaster smiled.

"I thought that might be an image, but it looks like I was wrong. You really are a shrewd old man. However, I am not short-tempered enough or young enough to grow angry when I am fooled. If you have something to discuss, then let us discuss it. However, we will not rest."

Bouichirou charged forward once more, but with less speed than before. He swung his sword with repeated quick and sharp blows. This allowed him to maintain his form and continue attacking even after the sword was deflected.

"We did indeed defeat the previous demon king together, but that did not improve the situation. I could no longer trust what you told me, "said the headmaster as he quickly rotated his arms to deflect all of the slashes.

"I was not lying when I said mankind will be destroyed!"

"I did not doubt that part. However, I began to wonder if you were wrong in your method of resolving that problem."

"I said mankind must take control of the gods to solve it! Humanity will decide what humanity does. It is the abdication of that responsibility that leads to our destruction!" shouted Bouichirou, but the headmaster shook his head.

"No. That is not what you wish for. Your fixation lies in that woman you spoke of."

Bouichirou's hands stopped moving then.

The two of them glared at each other at close range.

"I trusted you enough to tell you the truth 100 years ago. I never thought I would regret that decision," groaned Bouichirou quietly.

"I am still open to your trust. However, I learned something when we defeated the previous demon king. You merely want to take the demon king's place," stated the headmaster quietly.

Bouichirou was at a loss for words.

"You called it the Law of Identity, did you not? The women with that property somehow resemble each other. Did you see that in Soga Keena?" asked the headmaster.

Bouichirou swung up his sword.

"Do you think I am so petty a man!?"

The sword produced a great roar as it shot toward the headmaster. He deflected it and replied.

"I do not. Your good heart is an irreplaceably wonderful thing. You possess great determination and know loneliness because of it. And that is why."

"We must control the gods. That is how to avoid this destruction. What is wrong with that!? What good is destroying the gods? There is nothing right about that! That is nothing more than obeying one's urge for destruction!"

"Debating it here is of no use. However, I feel that your methods are wrong."

"And so the demon king is in the right!?"

"No, he is wrong as well."

"Stop being so selfish! Is there anything worse than an old man speaking from the sidelines!?"

"I was young 100 years ago."

The headmaster deflected Bouichirou's sword and stepped back. He was out of breath now.

"But I suppose I am no longer young."

Meanwhile, Bouichirou was not out of breath.

"I am not actually all that pressed for time. I can speak for a little while longer."

Bouichirou held up his sword once more and began a slow advance.

"I am not changing my strategy. Those that can fly can handle this flying enemy. That makes this simple."

After speaking sharply to 2V, Eiko spoke into her telepathic communicator to give orders to the confused battlefield.

"Platoons 1 and 2 to the main entrance, 3 to side entrance, 4 to the connecting passageway. Move away from the demon king and await further order. Prepare to enter the school."

Eiko split off a small portion of her troops and had them prepare for simultaneous entry.

"That will make it easier for your opponent to defend. Why are you splitting up your troops to send them in bit by bit?" protested 2V.

Eiko glared back at him and explained, "Because there is a danger of them growing desperate and blowing up the school building. And this is the demon king's army. Stopping the demon king is most important."

"Yes, if you had a plan for doing so."

"Hmph. Of course I have a plan. You said I needed to look at this three-dimensionally, but that just means I need to use the people who can fly."

Eiko grabbed her telepathic communicator once more.

"All Hattori forces are to use everything they have to take out the demon king and the black dragon."

Eiko waited for a response. The commander of the Hattori family was Hattori Junko. Eiko could not hear that girl's voice coming from the communicator.

"What is it, Junko? Did you hear me or not?" asked Eiko with a cruel smile.

"Understood!" roared back a voice.

Eiko grimaced for an instant, but laughed in amusement after ending the telepathic connection.

"Ha ha ha! That should do it, right? A lot of them can fly and it seems they have that clown Brave with them, too! Now, let's see how Junko chooses to fight!"

Eiko began to watch over the battle situation, but 2V frowned where she could not see him.

"She's even worse a commander than I thought… I knew she would be bad, but I cannot have the situation growing too unfavorable."

As he muttered to himself so she could not hear, 2V lightly gestured with his right hand to call over a subordinate.

A single waiting messenger soldier made his way into the tent.

Those around did not notice, but this was an odd action. As a member of CIMO 8, 2V had no authority to give orders to a soldier.

But the reason for this soon became apparent. The expression of the messenger soldier who leaned in toward 2V had the characteristic lack of self seen in L'Isle-Adams.

"How about we take the command for ourselves?" said 2V quietly.

He and the L'Isle-Adam messenger soldier exchanged a glance. That glance held the distinctive light of mana. When the L'Isle-Adam nodded back, a clear sense of self could be detected in its eyes.

This was the technique 2V excelled at. He would transfer his will to a L'Isle-Adam and control it as his own body. And the L'Isle-Adams left with the military's odd jobs had been remodeled to accept 2V's will.

"Now, what should we do next?" 2V asked Eiko.

Eiko began to explain what she was preparing to do, but 2V was barely listening. He was focused on sending the L'Isle-Adam messenger soldier to mix in with the infantry who were awaiting further orders.

"I wonder if things are going well for Bouichirou," muttered the messenger soldier with 2V's voice.

Chapter 2: So Many People Plotting Behind the Scenes

—Do I have no choice but to do it?

Junko realized she was hesitating over what she had supposedly already made up her mind over.

She stood on a battlefield, but the only enemy nearby was Akuto up in the air. Akuto was primarily taking action to hold back the soldiers approaching the school building. It may have partially been due to 2V's advice, but the unmotivated soldiers were moving as little as possible. The demonic beasts surrounding the school building remained in place, so Junko had not been faced with too much conflict. However, Eiko's new order had changed that.

—Come on. Do not hesitate.

Even as she gave that order to herself, many different thoughts raced through her mind.

—I know I have no choice but to obey my orders, but it was Eiko who gave the order. Simply doing what she says would be foolish. But this is for the sake of my family. No, but grandmother told me to follow my own will. But what does my will say? What do I want to do?

Junko's thoughts circled around and around like that, but the other Iga ninja still held a great grudge against Akuto. As soon as Junko had replied to Eiko's order, the members closest to the Hattori family of that 600-member ninja force had rushed to be the first to fly up into the air.

"We will take care of your grudge, young lady!" they all shouted.

They were the elite members, so almost all of them could use combat magic on their own. Five of them surrounded Akuto as he circled through the sky atop Peterhausen. They attacked Akuto with actions so coordinated they looked like a single being.

"Iga Ninja Art – Five Direction Magic Circle!"

The five ninja quickly changed their positions and followed through on each other's actions in an ideal formation. They attacked with swords, shuriken, and kusarigama. This powerful cooperative attack had likely been developed as a means of defeating giant demonic beasts.

"It has been a while since I fought, but I am glad to see human fighting methods have evolved!"

That cry of joy came from Peterhausen. That old dragon who was a relative of the gods seemed to be excited about fighting for the first time in 100 years.

But his master, Akuto, did not seem to be enjoying the fight.

"It is an unnecessary evolution. Plus, it isn't all that effective," he said disinterestedly.

He stood up atop Peterhausen's back, grabbed the leg of one of the attacking ninja, and swung him around to deflect the attacks from the other ninja.

"It seems they have planned what to do if a comrade is taken hostage, but they have difficulty handling unexpected events."

As Akuto spoke, he threw the ninja in his hands such that he knocked the evading ninja out of the air as well.

Seeing her men easily knocked back, Junko's blood rushed to her head in an instant.

"What do you think you are doing!?"

Junko jumped up. She reached for the sword at her waist. She placed a hand on one of the two hilts there, but quickly recalled it was the treasured sword of her family, the Sword of Sohaya. Only one chosen by the sword and by the god Suhara could draw that sword.

—Can I draw it? No, if I can't…

"Tch!"

Junko's grip switched over to the hilt of the short sword. She drew it, reversed her grip, and attacked Akuto with it.

This completely straightforward attack was stopped by Akuto barehanded. He tightly grabbed the blade.

"Kh…"

Junko grimaced. She pushed and pulled, but the short sword would not budge. And not even a drop of blood had flowed from Akuto's hand.

Akuto turned wordlessly toward Junko. The lack of malice in his eyes caused her to flinch back.

"Wha-…? Why are you looking at me like that!?"

Junko used the unmoving short sword as a pivot point and swung her leg around to kick at Akuto's face. Akuto easily avoided the kick by moving his head to the side. At the same moment, he let go of the short sword. Junko was sent spinning away from the momentum of her own kick.

"Kh…Wh-why…!?"

She did not shed tears, but she bit her lip. She could not stand that he was not even attempting to fight her. Her own powerlessness frustrated her to no end.

—It is like he does not even consider this a problem! I am his enemy yet he is not shaken in the slightest! Is that because I am too weak to be a threat? Or is it because he does not care about me at all? …Ahh! Why am I thinking about that!?

Junko sheathed her short sword. She then placed a hand on the Sword of Sohaya's hilt.

—If I only had the power to at least cut him once! If I did that, he would have to take me seriously!

"Why are you not worrying about me!?" shouted Junko.

As soon as she did, she realized she had unwittingly revealed her true thoughts.

—N-no…! Well, it is true…but it is not what I meant to say!

Junko charged forward with her hand still on the Sword of Sohaya, but she still could not draw it.

These two inconveniences put a look of shock on her face, but she could not end the momentum she had built up. She quickly approached Akuto with her hand still on the sword's hilt. She foolishly crashed straight into him.

"Ee!"

When Junko realized Akuto had caught her in his arms, she began to squirm. However, Akuto refused to let go.

"S-stop! What are you doing!?"

"I did not know you felt that way," said Akuto.

Junko stopped moving.

"Eh?"

"You are a more splendid person than me and you already have plenty of people following you. That is why I never considered that you might want me to worry about you."

Akuto made this comment by whispering in Junko's ear in a sincere voice.

"Y-you idiot… Have you forgotten the current situation?" rebuked Junko, but Akuto only shook his head and continued speaking.

"My fight is something only I can do, so I grew too focused on it. Once this is over, I will give you the attention you deserve."

"Th-the attention I deserve…?"

Junko's face explosively reddened and she sank down as all strength left her body.

"Take care."

Akuto gently held Junko's limp body in his arms and lowered her down. Her flight magic was still in effect, so she slowly floated down from the sky.

—Y-you idiot… If you say that, I will never be able to decide what to do…

Junko had descended mostly of her own will, but the Iga ninja watching from a distance did not see it that way.

"The young lady was defeated!"

"Ah! Damn that demon king! He fired magic at her from too close a range for her to escape!"

"Let's go! Once more!"

"Pour your anger into an Eight Direction Magic Circle Formation!"

The Iga ninja increased their numbers to eight for another attack against Akuto.

Peterhausen let out a sigh of exasperation when he saw it.

"I take back what I said. Even when they evolve, it just gives them more repetitive attacks…"

The black dragon swung a wing to blow the Iga ninja out of the air.

"They are only angry. Don't think too badly of them. I'm not sure why they're so angry though," said Akuto.

"More importantly, master, what should we do now? If there are no worthwhile opponents, there is no need to remain here. We should continue on to our objective."

"We can't do that. There is an opponent here we have to do something about."

Akuto was looking down toward Yuuko. She was Junko's younger sister and a famous idol. Her life had been put in danger when demonic beast mana had been put in her body, and Akuto's presence had affected her mind. She was half in a frenzy over her mistaken interpretation of Junko's fall, so she was flying up toward Akuto.

"That girl? You can ignore her. If you wish to save her life…"

Akuto cut off Peterhausen by pointing behind the girl.

"I am talking about him."

"You mean behind her?"

Peterhausen twisted his head around again and spotted another figure shooting up like a bullet behind Yuuko.

"Him!" shouted Peterhausen.

"Ohhhh!"

The figure slicing through the air in his ascent was Brave. He wore a special suit and was known as a hero who would appear anywhere to hunt down demonic beasts. His suit's output did not rely on mana, so the light enveloping him was not a mana light emission.

"I cannot detect any mana!" cried Peterhausen in surprise.

"Be careful. He can probably use a mana canceller."

Just as Akuto finished his warning, Peterhausen and Brave crossed paths.

The sound of metal striking metal was so loud that the soldiers on the ground could hear it.

After passing by, they put some distance between each other and faced each other.

Brave held up the high frequency blade claws coming from the back of his hand. He looked perfectly composed while Peterhausen's giant form lurched to the side.

"Oh! Now this is a surprise! In the more than one hundred years since my creation, I have never before been injured!"

As if working to remain conscious, Peterhausen flapped his wings to stabilize himself.

"You're injured? Are you okay?" asked Akuto worriedly, but Peterhausen's lips lifted in a cruel smile.

"Am I okay? I am more worried about this strength welling up within me being too powerful. It is precisely this type of joy I have lived for! The claws growing from his hand are as hard as my own! This is an even opponent! Only this opponent has ever led me to realize the purpose of my existence! Do you understand? As my master, you must!"

"I understand. Those born with power will always end up isolated. And that is doubly true for the ones like you who do not weaken with time. But we

need to be prepared to lose this time. Those claws have not yet shown the true power I saw before and he has other weapons as well," said Akuto.

In the video Akuto had seen, Brave's claws had vibrated at a high frequency. And he had yet to use the invisible wire that had instantly sliced through the demonic beasts surrounding him.

"Prepared to lose? Hah. I am always prepared to die, but I will never be prepared to lose," laughed Peterhausen.

"That's fine then," said Akuto sadly.

Brave stood in front of Yuuko who had caught up from below and whispered something to her. Yuuko must have agreed because she descended once more.

"It seems he is kind to women as well."

"As well?"

Ignoring Peterhausen's comment, Akuto pointed toward Brave.

"At any rate, if we do not do something about him, we cannot leave here."

"I see. You are right about that. He is a worthy opponent for us. Now, let us fight."

Peterhausen accelerated toward Brave.

Yuuko descended.

"Young lady, please do not be so reckless."

"Please leave this to us."

The ninja gathered worriedly around her, but she shook her head. She was not telling them she was fine. She pointed up into the air with a huge smile on her face.

"Don't worry. Brave has come to kill him. You all focus on killing the other demonic beasts," said Yuuko with the attitude of an idol.

A camera transmitting a live broadcast was on the battlefield and one cameraman was sticking especially close to Yuuko. That was likely keeping her acting more like an idol, but there was a madness in Yuuko that could not be fully explained by the camera.

"Everyone! Our orders don't matter! Brave will handle him, so we need to focus on raiding the school!"

Yuuko waved her hand to tell the others to come with her before she suddenly ran off.

The surrounding ninja were unsure what to do. Yuuko had blatantly announced she was disobeying her orders. And on top of that, Junko was the Iga commander.

When Junko had descended before Yuuko, she had said she was fine to the ninja gathering to protect her. However, she had to come forward and say something about Yuuko's actions.

"Yuuko! This is a battlefield! You cannot-…"

But her lecture was cut off midsentence. A cameraman and reporter had cut in.

"After being protected by the heroic Brave, Hoshino Yuri-chan is finally headed into battle! Yuri-chan! Yuri-chan!" The reporter pushed past Junko while calling out Yuuko's stage name. "Yuri-chan! Isn't this dangerous?"

"I'll be fine! Brave will punish the demon king for destroying our peace. That is why I need to hunt down the demonic beasts!"

Yuuko spoke plainly into the camera. It looked like a scene from a movie where a lovely idol was heading into battle after overcoming her fear. It was obvious she was acting, but the fact that this was a real battlefield would likely provide incredible excitement for the viewers.

And that was quickly proven to be the case. The voice of Eiko, their commander, came to Junko.

<The Hattori ninja forces are to let Yuuko do as she wishes.>

"Are you changing your orders?" asked Junko.

<Yes. This seems to have had quite an effect. You are fairly popular as well. You might be able to make an idol debut,> joked Eiko.

Eiko had allowed the broadcast in order to gain popularity, and it seemed she was receiving reports on the reactions from the viewers.

"…Understood," replied Junko with a feeling of disgust.

She belatedly continued after Yuuko and instructed the others to follow her.

The Hattori ninja forces advanced toward the school building with Yuuko in the lead. The unit that had been waiting near the school building had already begun battling the demonic beasts.

"Heh heh heh heh… The moment in which an enemy falls into your trap is wonderful every single time."

Fujiko grinned while watching the battle on several mana screens.

"You sound like a bad guy, senpai."

Keena gave her honest impressions as she watched Fujiko.

"I am a bad person," said Fujiko as if that was normal.

Once the student council president had left, Fujiko and Keena were alone in the small room if the Cerberus was not counted. However, the room felt cramped due to the screens filling it.

While rushing between the screens, Fujiko gave orders to the different demonic beasts. The footage on the screens came from the academy's surveillance cameras and Fujiko was using the cameras set up in locations crucial to her strategy. Simply put, they showed the locations the enemy was trying to enter through.

"This is progressing perfectly. The normal strategy at times like this is to besiege your enemy and wait for them to exhaust their supplies, but they cannot do that while broadcasting the battle. They could always attack the entire school building at once, but they are too afraid of the sacrifices that could cause. They can only attack simultaneously from the three optimal points of the main entrance, the back entrance, and the connecting passageway. You would almost think they want to fall into my trap! Ho ho ho ho ho."

Fujiko judged the timing while laughing.

The timing was the instant their enemy would enter. Some soldiers had constructed barricades near the school building. They had divided into a group hiding behind the barrier and firing their rifles and a group wielding swords preparing to charge in. The question was when those charging soldiers would take action.

Fujiko chose the demonic beasts with hard outer shells like crabs and turtles and had them stand outside. Rifle incantation bullets could not harm them. However, she had instructed the demonic beasts to fall back bit by bit. She was luring the enemy into a charge.

And then the soldiers received the order to charge from Eiko. It happened just after the Hattori ninja force was given permission to join the attack and it happened at the exact timing Fujiko had predicted.

The platoon leaders gave the signal to charge. The covering fire from the rifles grew thicker and incantation bullets filled with explosion magic caused intense explosions around each entrance to the school building. In the next instant, soldiers hidden by the smoke began their charge while covering for each other.

However, Fujiko's instructions to the demonic beasts came an instant sooner.

"Begin attacking each barrier! Target them from above!"

The demonic beasts began their attack simultaneously. The demonic beasts that could monitor their surroundings with sound waves accurately attacked the soldiers despite the smoke robbing them of their vision. The demonic beasts that could fly bypassed the smoke and explosions altogether and rushed the barricades.

The barricades had been constructed with attacks from the sky in mind. Not many of the soldiers could fly, but the platoon had a few that could. Those soldiers held large metal shields that functioned as mobile barricades, but there were simply too many demonic beasts. Helped by the fact that there was no official strategy for handling demonic beasts and the military's lack of experience in fighting them, the attack from above put them on the defensive.

The same was true for the infantry who had tried to charge the building. They must not have expected an attack from the demonic beasts because they were almost completely unable to respond. The flying demonic beasts had circled around behind them, so they were unable to even return to the barriers.

"All men fight back!" shouted a platoon leader as if to say there was nothing left for them to do.

Most of the individual soldiers could not use magic, so they had no chance against a demonic beast in a one-on-one battle. The platoon leader's command was a hopeless one. The soldiers were blown away by the demonic beasts one after another and they were quickly rendered unable to fight.

Even so, the few soldiers who could use magic protected their fellow soldiers and abandoned the barricades to begin a retreat. This helped calm the chaos a bit, but the unit that had begun their charge was still caught in the middle of the chaos.

After seeing that the same scene was playing out at each of the three entrances, Fujiko laughed loudly.

"Oh ho ho ho ho ho! Such a wonderful victory! The difference in commander could not be more obvious!"

As she watched on, Keena worriedly said, "I hope the soldiers are okay."

"Soldiers always fall back and leave the fight after they are injured. I cannot speak for 100 years ago, but they have a full medical unit now. And only a tiny percentage will be killed instantly. Also, you cannot win if you worry about that!"

Fujiko may have replied excitedly, but she did not order the demonic beasts to pursue the soldiers. Satisfied with routing all four platoons, Fujiko had the demonic beasts return to the school building.

"The Hattori ninja forces will arrive next. They are a powerful opponent where each individual can fight a demonic beast. I will need to change my strategy."

Fujiko turned her focus toward the Hattori ninja forces advancing toward the main entrance. The screen showed Yuuko and Junko walking in the lead.

"Ah, it's Junko-chan!" cried Keena worriedly.

Meanwhile, Fujiko grinned.

"This is perfect. I might never get a better chance to rid myself of a rival!"

"Ehh? You can't do that!" said Keena while pouting her lips, but Fujiko ignored her.

"Ho ho ho. It is Hattori-san's fault if she gets injured. Akuto-sama may forgive her for opposing him, but I will not!"

"Mh, you can't do that. Right, Cerpie?" said Keena as she began stroking the Cerberus's three heads.

"Please do not give it an odd nickname. And if you call it Cerpie, people might confuse it for the Kelpie, another type of demonic beast! …Plus, I thought you did not like dogs."

"Dogs are scary. But he has three heads, so he isn't a dog."

"What kind of criteria is that…?"

"That doesn't matter. If you keep doing this war thing, you'll have to answer to me."

"Answer to you?" What are you even talking about?"

Fujiko looked puzzled at Keena's odd comment.

But the situation outside was not going to wait around. Fujiko had to immediately respond to the threat of the Hattori ninja forces.

"Here they come! Okay, let's go, demonic beasts!"

Eiko had changed her orders to the Hattori family, but the results of the battle had left her confused afterwards.

"N-no… Ahh! Don't fall apart just because the enemy came out! I need to send in a unit that can fight demonic beasts… Oh, right! I sent the Hattori family in. I can have the other units fall back and leave this to them. No, wait. That would give them all the popularity!"

The reason she had taken command in the first place was for her own popularity. If the Hattori family resolved everything, she would not achieve that goal.

"But the battle at the main entrance is a great visual that I hate to give up. Should I send in some Teruya troops? No, having them arrive when the battle is already won would be bad. Maybe I can bring down some of the airborne troops from the aircraft carrier… Or should I send in the aircraft carrier itself?"

As Eiko worried over what to do, 2V spoke up from behind her.

"If you are troubled, we could lend a hand."

"Do you have an idea?"

The media was not currently in the command tent. Eiko could rely on 2V without worrying about shame or honor.

"One other member of the intelligence and magic office is here other than myself. I can have him handle this," said 2V in an amused tone.

He currently had his entire focus here rather than on controlling the L'Isle-Adam.

"What kind of person is this?"

"He is an infiltration and information gathering specialist. He is a bit of strange person, though. His codename is…"

Eiko did not quite catch the name.

—Did he say Lovers? No, the name doesn't matter.

"What can he do?" she asked.

"I will have him hinder the Hattori family's advance. You can then send in a Teruya family unit."

"Is it really that simple?"

Eiko was skeptical, but 2V nodded.

"It is. I want you to win as much as you do. You have no reason to doubt me," he said lightly. He then pointed upwards. "If you do not hurry, that will make the situation more troublesome."

It soon became clear what 2V meant by "that".

An intense explosion occurred. Eiko's vision was filled with brilliant light and a shockwave arrived soon thereafter. The tent and the telepathic communicator were almost blown away. The sound of the explosion arrived last.

Eiko looked over and finally understood what had happened. A gigantic sphere of fire had appeared in midair. It was part of the clash between Akuto and Brave.

"Wh-what was that!? How can a human being do that!?" cried out Eiko.

"I feel the same. However, it seems that is the foe we must battle," said 2V with an amused smile.

—He can defend against the plasma ball!?

Brave Hiroshi was shocked. He had expanded a sphere of plasma around him more as a means of defense than anything. Akuto had to have known that touching it would cause it to explode. Nevertheless, Akuto – or maybe Peterhausen – had not hesitated to charge directly into it. He had managed to withstand the great force of the plasma and attacked Hiroshi.

"If you are going to fight, make use of your body, youth!"

Peterhausen's roar and attack came at the same moment. Hiroshi crossed his arms in an X to block the dragon's claws before falling back.

—Make use of my body? But I have to calculate out how to use my weapons…

Hiroshi complained in his head.

The Brave suit seemed to transfer its weapons and energy in from a different dimension. The heavier weaponry took some time before it could be reequipped.

<Time until next use of high energy plasma ball: 4 minutes, 20 seconds.>

Whether he could use his weapons or not was displayed on his visor and the countdown reverberated in his head. He could reroute the power used to move the suit into an attack, but that would leave him unable to move for several seconds.

"I'm not going to listen to your lecture!"

Hiroshi had his claw blades vibrate at high frequency as he sliced them toward Peterhausen. Claw clashed with claw and intense sparks flew through the air.

"Wire!"

Hiroshi slid his left hand along and let loose the monomolecular wire. Peterhausen refused to touch it. The dragon moved down and Hiroshi shot forward.

"Tch!"

"Ohhhh!"

Peterhausen and Hiroshi soared through the sky as if intertwining. They produced a violent wind. That wind grew into a tornado which blew away everything nearby.

The soldiers positioned along their path were mostly blown away and the ones ahead of their path ran screaming away.

In the center of that tornado, Hiroshi shouted at Akuto.

"Speaking of that lecture, why aren't you fighting!?"

Peterhausen replied for Akuto.

"I am the one fighting, not my master! I wish to fight!"

"I'm not asking you! You! Why are you fighting!?"

Hiroshi was speaking only to Akuto.

"Because I want to kill the gods. That is all."

Akuto's voice was unexpectedly calm.

"What will that accomplish!? You will only jeopardize people's way of life, make demonic beasts run rampant, and spread destruction! With your power, you should be able to guide people in a better direction," roared Hiroshi.

Akuto replied, "If I could do that, I would. Did you never think that there is a reason I can't do that?"

"Eliminating that which threatens people's livelihoods or spreads destruction can only be a good thing! The number of criminals has dropped thanks to the gods. All that remain are the truly crazy ones!"

"Do I look crazy to you?"

"No, you don't. But whether you are truly crazy or not, your actions are still insane!"

"In that case, attack me. But if I do not look crazy to you, then I hope you will realize that there is legitimacy in my actions."

"Then what is that legitimacy!?"

"Mankind has given names to what is nothing more than a system and they think those names have physical form. That is what needs to be eliminated."

"That abstract nonsense is not a real answer!"

"Do you really think I can get to the heart of the issue by keeping this simple? I am saying mankind is relying too much on a story. The gods are only gods because we named them as such. People are not looking at the truth or the connections between each other. They are only forcing others into the story they have dreamed up for themselves. People seek good fortune in this story where the gods stand at the top, but they also use those standards to kill and to wage war. And so I will…"

Akuto trailed off there.

"You will what!?"

Hiroshi shot toward Akuto.

Peterhausen was unable to avoid this strike, but Akuto caught the high frequency blade in one hand.

The high frequency vibration caused mana light to spread in ripples.

As if pushing those ripples aside, Akuto twisted the high frequency blade and Hiroshi's arm along with it.

"I will inform mankind that their story has lost," he said.

"But that makes you a true demon king!" shouted back Hiroshi.

Hiroshi tried to wrap Akuto up in the wire coming from his left hand. Akuto stopped the wire in midair by using mana rather than touching it directly.

"That is a corruption caused by the story!"

Akuto sent Hiroshi flying back.

Hiroshi fired lasers from his back while righting himself in midair. As those lasers changed trajectory in midair, they looked like glowing spider legs growing from his back.

"But there are people who are suffering from nothing more than your presence! And there is a girl who cannot survive without relying on the current gods!"

As Hiroshi shouted out, the lasers shot toward Akuto one after another with slight time delays between them.

"There are people using the story to fool everyone for their own purposes! The people you mention are a victim of that!"

Akuto blew away the laser blasts with his aura alone. The deflected lasers stabbed into the surface, causing the soldiers to run around in panic.

"Don't be selfish! How do you plan to take responsibility!?"

Hiroshi called in the high temperature plasma ball that was finished reequipping.

"I will take care of everything afterwards! But only once the story of the gods and religion has been ended!"

Akuto ordered Peterhausen to fire a metal stake. The spiral-carved stake shot toward Hiroshi like a missile.

"No! You can save people right now! Why won't you remove the demonic beast mana from her body!? You absorbed the mana from a dog demonic beast once. Why can't you do it now!?"

Hiroshi was forced to defend against the metal stake by sending the high temperature plasma at it. Repeated overwhelming explosions occurred and the shockwaves violently shook the surrounding area.

Peterhausen and Akuto slipped through the gaps in the explosions to charge toward Hiroshi.

Before Hiroshi could right himself in midair, he was forced to defend against Peterhausen's fangs.

"You know me, don't you?" asked Akuto in a tone that said he was not expecting an answer.

—Whoops. I got too worked up.

Hiroshi regretted saying that, but he did not respond. After coming this far, he found he did not particularly care if his identity was revealed.

The more pressing issue was the dragon's maw before his eyes. He was just barely holding the upper and lower fangs open with his hands, but he would be helpless if the dragon fired a metal stake now.

—Is there any way of handling this?

The computer voice installed in Hiroshi's visor answered his thoughts.

<Will you switch to anti-demon king combat mode?>

—Is it dangerous?

<There is no danger. It allows you to kill a demon king with absolute certainty.>

—Absolute certainty…

Those words gave Hiroshi a chill. He felt as if he had been fighting based on a certain trust in Akuto so far. However, doubts welled up within his chest when it came to killing him with "absolute certainty".

But when Hiroshi saw a metal stake being produced within Peterhausen's throat, he had to make a decision.

"Dammit! Switch to anti-demon king combat mode!"

With that announcement, the Brave suit emitted a light that Hiroshi had never seen from it before.

The demon king and Brave's battle left the soldiers below in chaos, but the Hattori ninja forces remained perfectly composed.

However, the demonic beasts had not fallen into chaos either. As a result, the only proper battle was being fought in front of the main entrance.

The demonic beasts were employing a strategy of attacking in groups of three, but their organizational ability was still inferior to that of the Hattori ninja forces. They were unable to keep up with the splendid movements of the ninja who were providing cover for each other. The demonic beasts were cut down one after another.

The live broadcast focused on Yuuko, so her actions had to have stood out the most to the viewers. The viewers saw her cut down a demonic beast with her ninja sword and give orders to the ninja around her.

But in reality, the Hattori ninja forces were spread out around Yuuko because they could not allow any attacks to reach the cameraman and reporter who were near her. The only demonic beasts that reached her

were either injured or were isolated from their fellow demonic beasts. This made it much easier for Yuuko to defeat them.

"Can you see Hoshino Yuri-chan!? Can you see her powerfully fighting these demonic beasts despite being an idol!? This is the new feminine form for our modern age. Strong yet beautiful. This is the goddess we have all dreamed of seeing!"

Despite what was actually happening, the reporter was enthusiastically and excitedly raising his voice as he described Yuuko's actions. The broadcast Eiko was counting on for herself was being overwhelmingly filled with support for Yuuko.

—But I am not sure this is a good thing to gain popularity for.

As Junko glanced over at the situation around Yuuko, she cut down an approaching demonic beast.

—She has always cared about her comrades, but she was not the type to hunt demonic beasts so gleefully. Is the mana having some sort of negative effect on her?

There was too much Junko had to think about.

And then…

"You are Hoshino Yuri-chan's older sister, right?"

The reporter was holding the microphone toward Junko.

Junko did not reply and the reporter gave her a reproachful look.

—Is he dissatisfied that the situation is not progressing according to the story he had imagined?

Junko was displeased, but fortunately a demonic beast fell from the sky behind the reporter. It appeared to have already lost the ability to fight, but Junko took the opportunity to stab at it with her short sword.

The silver blade shot by next to the reporter's face.

"Ee!" shrieked the reporter.

The short sword stabbed into the demonic beast behind the reporter and warm blood spurted out.

"I am indeed her sister," said Junko as she twisted her body to avoid the blood.

The demonic beast collapsed toward the reporter and he ran away.

—Hm. That is one less annoyance I have to deal with.

However, that instant had been shown in the broadcast, so her popularity had suddenly jumped up. And unbeknownst to Junko, this had an effect on Eiko's command.

"You have to be kidding me! What is this Lovers guy doing!?'

Eiko was panicking. After she saw the reaction to the broadcast, she shouted at 2V.

Akuto and Hiroshi were continuing their superhuman battle in the air. This prevented the army from taking part in the battle and they had nearly been routed despite almost no casualties. In order to hide this disadvantage from the public, the broadcast was focusing on the Hattori ninja forces who were actually putting up a fight. However, Eiko could not stand that this was increasing even Junko's popularity.

"There is no way I am inferior to her! God dammit. Why do those stupid men always praise the virgins!?"

As Eiko began complaining about unrelated issues, she further pressed 2V.

"Where is this Lovers or whatever his name is?"

"Do not worry. He will handle this."

As soon as 2V gave that annoyed response, an eerie shadow cut across the battlefield displayed on a mana screen. 2V let out a whistle.

"There he is."

After seeing how well the situation was progressing, Junko debated whether she should continue following Eiko's instructions. If they continued on, they could clearly secure the main entrance as an entry point. However, that might be playing into their enemy's hands.

Also…

—If I continue on, I will be Sai and senpai's enemy.

Junko was still unsure what to do. She hated her own lack of decisiveness. No, she may have already made up her mind deep down. It was just that honor and family were keeping her from acting.

—In the end, it comes down to my cowardice.

Junko knew it was unlikely she could do anything even if she could change that, but she still regretted it.

—I wish I had the power to change it.

This was the first time she had ever hoped for political power rather than military power. She had always helped others almost too much and her personality ensured she was never bothered by training or her studies. For that reason, she had never understood why anyone would use their power for their own desires. However, she now understood, even if only slightly.

As the waves of demonic beast attacks settled down, she placed a hand on the Sword of Sohaya's hilt once more. She pulled, but it still refused to come out.

—I cannot draw it unless I am chosen by god… But grandmother said it only had to be something convenient for the god. So what does the god want in this situation?

As Junko thought on that, a demonic beast moved in her peripheral vision.

—They are not going to let me rest, are they?

Junko drew her short sword once more and moved forward. The demonic beast resembled a human, but it moved on four long legs.

—No… This is…!

A bad feeling caused Junko to stop in her tracks. Unlike the other demonic beasts, this one was not attacking in a group. And it did not resemble any of the others.

Her bad feeling turned out to be dead on. This creature swung its arm like a whip. And that arm stretched out and swept through the space Junko had been before she quickly jumped back.

"This does not look like a demonic beast," muttered Junko.

Its skin shined like rubber. Its head had no hair and glistened. It looked like a human covered entirely in tights or like some new type of creature, but its arms were too long to be human and some of its joints seemed to bend in the opposite direction of a human's. However, its aura was not that of a demonic beast.

—In that case, why is it attacking us?

Junko was confused, but she had no time to investigate. It must have deemed Junko a formidable opponent because it jumped past her and began attacking the rest of the Hattori ninja forces.

"Watch out!" cried Junko.

The ninja heard Junko's warning and saw the enemy arrive, but several of them were still blown away in an instant.

—It can't be!

Junko was shocked. She had clearly seen what had blown them away. Every single one of the attacked ninja had tried to defend against the strike with their swords. However, that rubber-like arm seemed to have both flexibility and durability. Unbelievably, the swords were unable to slice through the arm. It looked like a contradictory existence such as a soft metal rod. The areas struck by the swords bent, but the tension snapped back and blew away the ones holding the swords.

"Avoid that arm!"

The Hattori ninja forces reacted immediately. While all shouting that warning, they attacked the mysterious creature. Several were beaten down by irregular movements, but five of them made it right up to the creature. The stabbed their swords into it simultaneously.

However, their eyes all opened wide in surprise. The swords had definitely pierced its body…or so it seemed at first. In reality, it was similar to stabbing a rubber sheet with a stick. The creature's body stretched and the swords stabbed through to the other side of its body, but the skin was never broken.

"Gh!"

"How can this be!?"

The Hattori ninja forces let out cries of surprise. Like rubber snapping back into place, the creature's body returned to normal. The elasticity caused the swords to fly up into the sky and blew away the ones holding tightly onto those swords.

"Stand back. If I use heat…!"

With that comment, one of the Hattori ninja forces decided to use magic. He produced a ball of fire which flew toward the rubber creature. However, that ball of fire was annihilated by flames fired from the rubber monster's mouth.

This was one of the reasons battles between those skilled in magical combat ultimately came down to hand-to-hand combat. If one used magic to cause damage, mana could be used to negate the effects. However, only humans could do that. Demonic beasts could not.

—It is powerful… But why is a human attacking us?

As Junko's confusion grew, she ordered the Hattori ninja forces to fall back.

And with perfect timing, armored warriors advanced into the area the Hattori family had held before. They belonged to the Teruya family's forces.

"You fools! Stay back! That thing is dangerous! Stay away!" shouted Junko.

But those armored warriors completely ignored her. They created an orderly line and advanced.

"Wait!" she shouted again, but the rubber monster surprisingly disappeared into the school building.

Thanks to the Hattori ninja forces defeating the demonic beasts, the main entrance had been freed, but no one had thought someone like that would be the first to pass through the gate.

"The most powerful demonic beast has fled from the Teruya family's army!" shouted the reporter following Yuuko around.

It may indeed have looked that way to those who had not directly fought that rubber monster.

—But from how that thing fought, I doubt it would fall back no matter what enemy arrived. That must mean… but it can't be…

Junko grew suspicious.

"So that is who you were talking about. You could have told me you said Rubbers and not Lovers!"

Eiko grinned as she watched the battle on a mana screen. It seemed Rubbers's appearance had prevented the Hattori family from taking too much of the credit.

"I just wish I could have been out there to put on a show," said Eiko jokingly.

2V, on the other hand, gave a serious response.

"Hm… That probably would have worked. He is a masochist, so he would have gladly let you hit him."

"Is that thing human?"

"He is such a masochist that he experimented with magically altering his own body. Thanks to that, he no longer looks human. However, he is a powerful force in magical combat. Now, as planned-…"

Just as 2V said that, something even he had not predicted occurred.

The Teruya family armored warriors had immediately tried to enter the school building, but their advance suddenly came to a halt. A moment later, one of the armored warriors in the lead was sent flying backwards. As he flew back, he knocked back the others behind them as if they were bowling pins.

"What?"

Eiko peered into the mana screen in surprise.

With relaxed movements, a figure stepped out into the space in which the Teruya family armored warriors had been. Of all people, it was the student council president, Lily Shiraishi.

"Do not enter the school without the student council's permission."

Lily rotated her right wrist as it made crackling noises.

This angered Eiko.

"Dammit! To hell with her! Just take her out!"

Eiko gave orders to her family's men, but Lily knocked several of them away with her extending arms before those orders could reach them. The attack was not as powerful as Rubbers's, but it was still plenty strong.

"You worthless men! I'll send in another unit to…"

In her irritation, Eiko finally checked the state of the overall battle.

And she was shocked at what she found. Due to victory being almost assured once they made their way into the school building, she had given almost no orders to the other units. The ground forces were almost entirely unscathed, but they had fallen into chaos as they tried to avoid the effects of the battle between Akuto and Hiroshi. Not only did she not have almost a thousand soldiers divided into platoons and awaiting orders, but the soldiers did not even know where any of their fellow soldiers were.

And the midair battle between Akuto and Hiroshi was still ongoing. Its fierceness had caused the soldiers' morale to drop like a rock. A clearly superhuman battle was unfolding overhead and the elites of the Hattori and Teruya families were battling the demonic beasts ahead.

Those demonic beasts had been driven back all at once by the Hattori family's attack, but they had begun to gather at the main entrance once

more. And at every other point around the school building, the demonic beasts were almost entirely unscathed.

"A-am I…losing?"

As that possibility finally occurred to Eiko, her face paled in fear.

If she lost, her incompetence would be revealed to the entire empire. And on top of that, her patricide would likely come to light as well. If that happened, she would be completely ruined.

"Sh-should I order the entire army to attack…?" muttered Eiko.

"No, you still have other options left," said 2V frantically.

Eiko still had most of her military force. They had only been thrown into chaos. If she gave appropriate orders, they could reorganize and recover. Also, the aircraft carrier and the elite airborne troops waiting onboard were not affected by the chaos. Eiko had merely given into fear and could not think rationally.

—Using her is not easy when she is this incompetent. It looks like being a bit reckless and aiming for mutual destruction is my only chance.

2V changed his mental strategy.

"Have the ground troops fall back and send in the aircraft carrier. I said to avoid damaging the surrounding area, but in the current situation, no one will blame you for destroying the school building. It will look like the demon king and his side are the ones destroying everything, after all."

2V's words must have sounded promising to Eiko.

"I-I see… You're right!"

And Eiko gave the order to send in the aircraft carrier.

—Sigh. What a pain.

2V secretly grinned. He then focused his mind.

A trap he had set up ahead of time activated. Completely ordinary soldiers assigned to each unit began moving according to 2V's will. They were L'Isle-Adams disguised as humans. They were not the standard autonomous variety. These dolls would have no will of their own without

the intervention of 2V's magic. About 50 of them had been slipped into the army in all.

One of 2V's L'Isle-Adams had of course been sent to the bridge of the aircraft carrier.

"Begin the advance. Approach the school building and mop up the demonic beasts along the walls."

After having Eiko's orders relayed by the captain, 2V's doll nodded with an innocent expression as it held the aircraft carrier's helm.

—Now then. Let's make sure this works.

"This is quite bad."

Fujiko thought as she stood before the underground altar.

"What is it?" asked Keena.

"The aircraft carrier Genkaku has begun to move."

Fujiko manipulated several mana screens to display Genkaku from various angles. The giant ship had been stopped a short distance from the schoolyard, but it had begun to slowly move toward them.

"Is it really that bad for it to come here? You have an idea what to do, right?" asked Keena.

Her innocence irritated Fujiko.

"Of course I have an idea! But it is a last resort. I will destroy the school building."

"The school building will go boom?"

"If I have the demonic beasts destroy it just barely underground, it will all sink down, right? There is nothing more I can do about the aircraft carrier's attack. But doing that signifies our loss. We need to flee when it happens."

"Then wouldn't we have lost right away if they had sent in the aircraft carrier at the beginning?"

"Stop pointing out the flaws in my plan! Yes, we would have. But I thought the aircraft carrier would pursue Akuto-sama. I never expected he would be held in place by that thug named Brave." Fujiko was regretful and she

looked over to another mana screen. "Also, it hurts that I lost track of that rubber man even though he has to be in the building somewhere."

"Really? How did you lose track of him?"

"If I knew that, I would not be having so much trouble! Where did he get off to…? I have some demonic beasts with good noses searching for him, but I can only hope his presence does not become a fatal factor for us. Honestly, if Akuto-sama could only take care of Brave!"

Fujiko wailed as she scratched at her hair.

"I told you not to fight, remember?"

Keena had been talking normally, but she suddenly fell silent.

"What is it?"

Fujiko glanced back toward Keena. Keena did not appear much different from normal, but she looked like she was dreaming.

"Nothing, senpai. Hey, what do you think of this world's situation?"

"What?"

Fujiko turned around in surprise.

"I am asking you about the sorrow of people fighting each other despite all wanting a world without fighting," said Keena.

Fujiko found Keena's behavior odd, but it did not seem dangerous. She felt wrong not giving an answer, so she replied while continuing her work.

"Just because they are fighting does not mean it is a sorrowful situation. If the options are a massacre or a war, you can only welcome war. A world without war would be a world where everyone can carry out a massacre," said Fujiko, but she received no answer.

"Then you'll have to answer to me," said Keena.

The usual Keena was back.

"…Is that a phrase you learned recently?"

"Eh? What?"

Keena looked confused.

—This is anti-demon king combat mode?

Hiroshi was confused by the lack of change. His output, his weapons, and his energy transfer speed had not improved.

However, he soon realized that there was less of a burden on him when he blocked Peterhausen's claws and that his attacks had more force behind them.

—What is going on?

Hiroshi was amazed at the effect of his first attack. The force of his attacks gradually grew and they soon reached a level that threatened to blow Peterhausen out of the sky.

"The mana is being negated," Akuto told Peterhausen.

"So that is what this is. My internal mana is not being affected much, but I cannot transfer it outside of my body very well," groaned Peterhausen.

"We need to put some distance between us."

Peterhausen shook his head at that suggestion.

"No. He is faster. We must not turn our backs to him."

"Then let's come up with some means of handling this," said Akuto. The aircraft carrier then slowly moved into view. "Not good. That thing's started to move."

"And it seems to be targeting the school building. They must no longer care about appearances."

Peterhausen saw it too.

The infantry down below must have been relieved by Genkaku's presence because they began reorganizing and falling back into formation. Unbeknownst to Akuto and Peterhausen, this morale recovery was thanks to the work of the dolls 2V had slipped into the army's ranks.

"Do we have to deal with two enemies now?" muttered Akuto.

Peterhausen grinned.

"Exactly. But that is not necessarily a bad thing."

"Are you rejoicing over another powerful enemy?"

"No, it is more than that. From my past experiences, I know that large weapons like that have mana producers inside. They need it to power their weaponry."

"I see. It's dangerous, but I guess we should approach it as we fight."

Akuto sent Peterhausen toward the aircraft carrier.

Genkaku was known as an aircraft carrier, but it contained an airborne unit rather than actual aircraft. However, the airborne troops' equipment was not specialized for being dropped to the ground. They wore reinforced outfits that allowed them to fly and fight in midair and even perform bombings. They looked like they were carrying airplanes on their backs and they were especially feared by the countries outside the empire. The aircraft carrier powered itself and produced mana, so it could be sent into areas in which mana was not disseminated. It had been designed to defeat enemies who used the internal-combustion engines of an older age.

Depending on the situation, each individual airborne soldier could function as a gun battery. If they carried long-range cannons, they could line up on the deck and use their judgment and magic ability to fire accurately even at long-range.

Airborne soldiers who had those long-range cannons on their backs and were ready to fire were currently lining up on the deck. When they saw Akuto, they began preparing to fire.

"Our target is the demon king and the demonic beasts. Unless otherwise ordered, you may choose whatever target you wish. Finish them off while keeping the damage to the Constant Magic Academy school building and the surrounding area within reasonable limits. The one known as Brave is not a target. However, do not worry about accidentally hitting him."

Those were the instructions from their commander. The airborne soldiers did not look nervous as they prepared their long-range cannons and awaited orders.

"Begin the attack."

Arrows of light fired from all of the soldiers lined up on the aircraft carrier deck.

Peterhausen flew toward the aircraft carrier in a splendid trajectory that avoided what looked like torrential rain falling sideways.

Hiroshi followed and avoided the initial attack, but he must have realized that what looked like particles of light were being annihilated around him because he stopped avoiding all but the attacks heading straight toward him.

"Our power is back, but we are still at a disadvantage," laughed Peterhausen.

"You didn't think about what to do after this?" asked Akuto in shock.

"Is that a problem?" replied Peterhausen calmly.

"No, I suppose not. At any rate, it's time to think," answered Akuto.

A few airborne soldiers jumped from the aircraft carrier. They held spear-like weapons. They looked well suited for using against a black dragon.

"It looks like we do not have to think after all."

"Don't sound so happy about that," complained Akuto.

"Joy should be honestly expressed!"

As Peterhausen let out a roar of delight, he flew in between five of the airborne soldiers. The soldiers were likely doing their very best, but Peterhausen flew circles around them like he was playing with some puppies. He then rushed forward, stopped, and let loose an intense attack.

Akuto was being directly targeted as well, so he swept aside the spears with his hands, grabbed and bent them, and threw back balls of fire.

"These seem to be the elites!" rejoiced Peterhausen like a child.

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself," said Akuto with a shrug.

However, the battle quickly ceased to be pleasant for Peterhausen. A figure appeared in front of them. Needless to say, it was Hiroshi.

"Out of the way!"

Akuto struck one of the airborne soldiers following him around. It was not really an attack. He only shoved the soldier, but that sent the man tumbling through the air. He stalled and he began falling in a tailspin.

Hiroshi was looking only at Akuto.

"He really is our only true enemy," complained Peterhausen.

"It looks like we have to settle this," said Akuto with resolve in his voice.

Panic had fallen over the aircraft carrier bridge.

"How are we being toyed with this much?"

The captain's voice was filled with more fear than confusion. The screen that displayed information on the state of the battle was currently showing several points of light. Those lights were indicated as allies, but their statuses were changing to "incapacitated" one after another. The screen displaying actual video footage also made it clear the airborne troops were at a disadvantage.

"We are the ones here with combat experience! What are you people doing!?"

The captain raised his voice, but no one replied. He was not simply shouting out in anger. He had done nothing wrong strategically. They were simply up against too dangerous an opponent. It was completely true that each individual soldier had to do give this their all.

The most dangerous individual was Hiroshi. He was not actively attacking the military, but the airborne troops who approached him would lose their mana which would incapacitate them. They were rendered unable to fight properly.

Akuto was of course their worst enemy. Peterhausen calmly used the airborne troops as shields. Akuto was more reserved, but he still stole the airborne soldiers' weapons and would lead Peterhausen to use the aircraft carrier's armor as a wall to avoid attacks.

"Do not let them do as they wish! Do not let the country's dignity waver in the eyes of the people!" roared the captain, but the silence remained.

No. A single voice spoke up in response.

"How about I handle this, captain?"

The man spoke in a disrespectful tone and the look on the captain's face changed.

"Who said that!?"

The soldier holding the helm raised his hand.

"It was me, the helmsman. I'm asking for freedom to do what I want."

Everyone on the bridge was shocked to hear that un-military-like tone. Everyone turned toward the helmsman. And they all realized something impossible. They did not recognize him. They wondered how they had not noticed it before.

"Who are you!?"

"Like I said: the helmsman. For the moment, at least," said 2V.

"Like hell you are! Did you sneak in here using hypnotism magic!?" shouted the captain.

At the same moment, he motioned with his hand for the secondary helmsman to take out the helmsman.

The secondary helmsman nodded and immediately fired a magical explosion at the helmsman. The explosion hit the helmsman's head dead on. Flames burst out for an instant and then smoke wafted up. He had perfectly controlled his explosion so as to kill his target while not harming the bridge.

The helmsman's head was gone. The secondary helmsman brought his hand to the console to take control of the ship, but the main control refused to transfer over.

"Wha-!?"

He looked back over at the helmsman and saw an uncanny sight. The headless helmsman still held the helm as before.

"A-a doll!"

The lack of blood told the secondary helmsman what was happening.

"That's right. But it's already too late."

A voice came from somewhere on the headless helmsman. The bridge crew shot to their feet and tried to stop him, but the aircraft carrier shook greatly.

That was when the captain and everyone else on the bridge realized what 2V was trying to do. The aircraft carrier was gigantic, but its high output engine was enough to provide the same mobility as a light aircraft. The

problematic air resistance could be reduced by controlling the air itself with mana.

The aircraft carrier took an action that showed no concern for those aboard. That giant ship was over 350 meters long and yet it performed the maneuver known as the Immelmann turn. The ship rapidly ascended before rotating sideways. After that turn, it began to descend.

Those inside who were not strapped down and the airborne troops on the deck who had not expected it were all tossed around and slammed into the ship.

However, Genkaku did not lower its speed. And its target soon became clear.

—Why is this happening!?

Hiroshi was irritated. He felt as if his irritation over not knowing how to handle his fight with Akuto was exploding out.

In the end, he knew that his irritation came from his trust of Akuto. That was why he could not stand what Akuto was doing.

"Ohhh!"

Hiroshi charged in once more. He had realized the aircraft carrier was producing mana, but he could still fight evenly. And when separated from the ship, he had an overwhelming advantage. His current attack sent a fierce impact into Peterhausen. It had obviously sent the dragon flying farther than before.

—I just have to neutralize him! If I can only defeat the black dragon!

Hiroshi quickly accelerated to take advantage of this opportunity. He advanced while avoiding the airborne troops raining down from above. He approached Akuto. He could clearly see Akuto's expression.

However, he had been so focused on Akuto that he had not paid enough attention to the situation as a whole. Why had they moved away from the aircraft carrier? And why where the airborne soldiers suddenly raining down from above? Those facts had not properly registered with him.

"Haaahhhh!"

Hiroshi charged in while expanding a high-temperature plasma ball, but Akuto's expression confused him.

Akuto was clearly looking somewhere other than Hiroshi. When he did look over at Hiroshi, a kind expression appeared on his face.

—Wh-why is he giving me that look?

Hiroshi grew confused and Akuto threw a stolen airborne soldier spear at him. He was targeting the high-temperature plasma ball.

"!"

Hiroshi could have avoided the spear if it had been targeting him directly, but avoiding an attack on the high-temperature plasma ball was more difficult. He released the plasma, creating an explosion that enveloped the spear. The mana canceller was of no use here. Hiroshi was blown backwards.

—He used that expression to get in a surprise attack!? But I can recover right away from that!

Hiroshi righted himself while keeping his eyes on Akuto, but to his surprise, his vision was suddenly dyed gray.

—What!?

An instant later, he finally realized what had happened.

The gray he saw was Genkaku. The nose of the giant aircraft carrier had passed by right in front of his eyes.

And it did so at unbelievable speed. The aircraft carrier cut by at a speed that rivaled his own.

But Hiroshi also saw something else: Akuto and Peterhausen had been struck by the ship's nose.

—It can't be… That's insane…

Hiroshi instructed the suit's internal computer to display some footage on his visor. The footage was a replay of what had occurred just a few seconds earlier.

The spherical nose of the ship had indeed struck Akuto and Peterhausen as it dropped at high speed. After striking Peterhausen directly on the side, Genkaku continued descending toward the ground.

"Ahh! Aniki!"

A mixture of shock and regret let that cry escape Hiroshi's lips.

Genkaku continued to drop at the same speed before it began flying horizontally just above the surface. It then slammed directly into the school building.

Smoke and a great noise of impact spread throughout the surrounding area. The nose had completely sunk into the center of the school building. The objects scattered around the school building were likely the corpses of demonic beasts. Some soldiers who had failed to escape may have been among them as well.

—Th-they were crushed?

Hiroshi descended toward the school building in disbelief. He broke through the smoke and followed the deck to the nose. A giant hole had been opened in the school's wall. A portion of the wall had been reduced to rubble and was scattered across the deck, but what he found inside the hole was even worse. The spherical nose was almost entirely buried in rubble. It was nigh impossible to tell what was underneath.

"I-it can't be…"

He descended within the school building.

As the cloud of dust began to clear, Hiroshi sensed a presence and took a defensive stance.

He saw a tall man in a hallway on the border between the crumbled wall and the floor where the building retained its original form.

—Wh-who is that?

Hiroshi was bewildered by the man's unusual presence.

"Well, this certainly was fortunate. It may have been the one piece of good fortune in my unlucky life."

The man, Bouichirou, spoke and laughed.

The headmaster was buried under rubble at Bouichirou's feet. The old man was breathing, but he was badly injured.

"D-damn you!" yelled Hiroshi in a cracking voice.

However, Bouichirou put away his sword and waved his hand.

"Please wait, hero who battles the demon king. If you have that suit, I assume you are of the Miwa family."

"Th-then you…" Hiroshi gasped. "Are you the one who left us this suit!?"

Hiroshi was left speechless when he realized that this man matched his father's description perfectly.

"Nice to meet you, I suppose. I am Yamato Bouichirou," said Bouichirou in a satisfied voice.

Chapter 3: Akuto and the Flying Aircraft Carrier

"Y-your name does not matter. Who are you and what are you doing here?" asked Hiroshi.

He was flustered and he did not have time to wait for an answer. He had to help the headmaster. While keeping a cautious eye on Bouichirou, he began digging the old man out of the rubble.

The headmaster was conscious. However, he was more concerned about Bouichirou than grateful for being rescued.

"S-stop him…" said the headmaster.

His body had shriveled up. He had completely returned to being a dried-up old man. He also had blood dripping from his forehead.

"But you're hurt…"

"I will be fine. I have merely used too much of my internal mana. If I had not altered the trajectory of that giant object when it crashed, I would have been crushed."

The headmaster stood while propped up by Hiroshi and he tried to take an unsteady step forward.

"Don't be reckless!"

Hiroshi stepped forward to protect the headmaster. He held up his high-frequency blade.

"Calm down."

However, Bouichirou snapped his fingers and Hiroshi's suit vanished. It seemed to have been transferred back to the other dimension. Hiroshi's normal self was exposed.

"Wah!"

Hiroshi looked down at his body in surprise. He frantically shouted into the unit on his arm.

"Brave!"

But nothing happened. Hiroshi looked up and toward Bouichirou.

"I-it can't be…"

"Of course it can. I was the one who left that suit for you, remember?"

"Then you…"

"I came from the future."

Those words sounded like a joke, but Hiroshi was convinced they were true.

"That is right. He came from the future. And he is trying to bring the gods under his control," said the headmaster as he pushed past Hiroshi and stepped forward.

"No way…"

The headmaster turned back toward Hiroshi.

"You are one of the students, aren't you? In that case, please stand back. I cannot allow my students to be hurt any more than they already have."

The headmaster forced a smile and Bouichirou coldly shook his head.

"You no longer have the strength to defend against my attacks. And I am here with a specific objective in mind. If you fall back, I will not kill you."

"I cannot allow that. There are things I must be stubborn about as well."

"But an old man like you has little inherent mana. When you use the mana you have accumulated from outside sources, it takes time before you can accumulate more. I do not know the secret to the trick that lets you dodge my Hodgson-style perfect slice, but it is clear you cannot use it without mana." Bouichirou drew his sword once more. "A dimensional slice does not allow one to strike with the back of the sword."

The headmaster spoke mockingly to Bouichirou's repeated warning.

"I know that. But I cannot bring shame to myself in front of a student."

"I really do not want to kill you, but you are truly stubborn."

The instant Bouichirou swung up his sword, Hiroshi ran in front of the headmaster.

"Wait! Do not hurt the headmaster!"

Hiroshi was unprotected. However, his shout was clear and strong just like when he was transformed into Brave. He took a fighting pose, but it was also the same he used as Brave.

"You have no chance without the suit."

Bouichirou was not mocking him; he simply indifferently told the truth.

But Hiroshi did not falter.

"I know that. But you need me."

"Hm?"

Bouichirou raised his eyebrows in surprise.

"Only I can use the suit. You went out of your way to develop a suit for fighting the demon king and then you gave it to me. That means you cannot defeat the demon king on your own. You are afraid the demon king is still alive."

"Oh?" exhaled Bouichirou in reply. "Are you saying you will help me?"

"…I do not know," replied Hiroshi honestly.

It was no more than wishful thinking to say Akuto was still alive, but Hiroshi had no choice but to say it here. Saying it finally let it hit home that he might have killed Akuto, but the battle was not yet over. He could not give in to grief and break down crying here.

"I do not know who you are or what your goal is, but I need power. That is why I must ask you what you are trying to do."

Hiroshi's thoughts were on Yuuko. He needed the power to protect her.

As Hiroshi walked toward Bouichirou, the headmaster called out.

"Wait!"

But when Hiroshi turned back toward him, the headmaster shook his head as if he had changed his mind.

"No. Perhaps I should leave the decision to the young. Do as you see fit."

Having said what he needed to say, the headmaster sat down in resignation.

Hiroshi's face twisted in anguish, but he shook his head to resolve himself.

"Now, explain to me whether it is right to bring the gods under our control or to kill them."

Hiroshi began walking with Bouichirou.

"Well, this may be all an old man like me is capable of," muttered the headmaster as he began using his slender arms to remove the rubble at his feet. "Now, I think I managed to save him with the last of my mana. What expression does someone have after being hit by an aircraft carrier?"

"I do not know if you will believe me, but mankind was destroyed in the future."

Bouichirou began speaking to Hiroshi as they headed underground.

"Destroyed?"

"The demon king destroyed it of course. And he did so by killing the gods."

"What exactly do you mean when you say he killed the gods?"

"It is a bit difficult to explain. The gods have a will of their own, but they do not possess a body."

Hiroshi understood that much.

"That is why they do not possess thought processes centered on a body. They are a contradictory existence that thinks despite having no true form to think with. It is true they have the computer circuits. However, no one knows how many circuits are needed before thought is born. All we know is that a will is born when enough circuits are brought together. You can think of it as similar to how we do not know where the one's will is located in the human brain. Their non-body focused thought processes leave them with no distinction between themselves and the outside world, and so they are able to think in terms of the infinite. I do not mean the mathematical concept of infinity. I mean an infinitely dense infinity. And this means they can arrive at the infinite past for living creatures. The bodiless gods can arrive at the thought processes of single-celled life forms. That is the same as the birth of life and the birth of thought. And thoughts themselves create a universe. Not a scientifically observable universe, mind you. There is a theory saying that this world could have been created five minutes ago and we can never prove otherwise if our memories are false. However, that

theory only holds when one has a physical body. Bodiless thoughts invalidate that theory. In other words, the universe exists and time is absolutely irreversible."

Hiroshi did not understand most of what Bouichirou said.

"What exactly do you mean?"

"The gods wish to die so they can be born as life forms in a different universe."

Bouichirou finally arrived at the core of the issue.

Hiroshi's intuition told him what the man was getting at.

"Then the demon king is…?"

"Most likely, he is a device of destruction the gods create by skillfully manipulating people. An existence known as the Law of Identity is also created at the same time. When the demon king binds the Contract of the One with the Law of Identity, she will act as a vessel for them to be reborn in a different universe."

"And what happens once that happens?"

Hiroshi gulped.

"Every human will die. No, they will not die, but it will all be over. The gods only view humans as data. That is why the gods view the physical body for themselves to be the only one necessary. Although, that also means they will began as single-celled life forms in the next universe. It has been said that might be so they are not destroyed by a true god that is external to them, but that has not been confirmed. And even if it is, if the gods are brought under my control, the problem can still be resolved. We must protect our happiness as humans. We must love each other, give birth to children, and raise those children. Nothing could be better," said Bouichirou calmly.

"How can this be?" said Hiroshi in shock.

"The fact that I can overcome time and touch other dimensions is because there is an existence outside of our universe, but it is also possible thanks to the Law of Identity's existence. I will bind the contract with the Law of Identity and bring the gods under my control. Do you understand now that this is not a sinister objective?"

Bouichirou's question left Hiroshi trembling.

—If the demon king… If aniki really is an existence created by the gods, this is all just too sad. I want to let him live… I really do… Is it really for the sake of humanity for him to die?

As a strange mixture of resignation and pity welled up within him, Hiroshi spoke to Bouichirou.

"I will help you. But…if the demon king really is still alive, please leave him to me. Even if I choose to let him live, I just have to make sure he cannot interfere, right?"

"I would be grateful if you could do that," said Bouichirou with a nod.

"We…really have lost."

Fujiko hung her head down in sorrow. Now that Akuto had been lost, there was no more reason to fight.

"Don't worry. A-chan is still alive."

However, Keena remained calm.

"Eh?'

Fujiko raised her head.

"After all, I can still feel his presence or sensation or whatever," said Keena as if it were normal.

"R-really?"

Fujiko was unsure whether she could rely on such uncertain information. She had a feeling doing so would only make the later disappointment all the worse.

But Keena did not simply seem confident. She seemed to believe in Akuto's survival as much as she believed she was currently standing on the earth.

"It's true."

"I see… Understood." Fujiko decided that, if she were going to lose, she would resist until the very end. "But the state of the battle could not be worse. The enemy may have panicked from the aircraft carrier's collision,

but we lost most of the demonic beasts. They will make their way in before long. And Bouichirou has made his way past the headmaster as well."

They had little to work with. The largest problem was Bouichirou's approach. Fujiko had naturally been interested in what Bouichirou had to say. She was thinking on what she had heard him say over the mana screen.

—Most likely, Soga Keena is the Law of Identity. And Bouichirou is likely correct. The black magician doctrine of obtaining freedom without interference from the gods matches the idea of killing the gods without binding that contract with the Law of Identity. What he says and what he is doing are both correct.

But even though she knew that, Fujiko also knew Bouichirou was her older brother's enemy.

—He killed my brother. And Akuto-sama is wonderful. In that case, what is it I should do?

Fujiko stood up.

"We must leave!"

"Eh? But don't we have to protect the altar?" asked Keena as she tilted her head.

"Were you not listening at all? Bouichirou's target is you!"

"Ehhhhhh!?" cried Keena as if she had only just learned that.

—I see. Her awareness as the Law of Identity and her normal awareness are mixed together.

Fujiko called the Cerberus over and snatched the jar from the altar.

—As long as I have this, I can at least keep the demonic beasts active.

She put Keena on the Cerberus's back before straddling it herself.

"Now, let us go!"

Fujiko had the Cerberus begin to run. But it stopped moving before it got up to speed.

"What is it?"

Fujiko lightly struck the Cerberus's back, but it did nothing but stare at one portion of the underground labyrinth's passageway.

"It can't be!"

Fujiko swiftly pulled a potion bottle from the leather bag attached the Cerberus and threw it down the passageway. The bottle hit the wall and shattered, scattering a yellow liquid everywhere.

"Camouflage! I knew it!"

The yellow spray caused an odd unevenness to appear on the wall. That unevenness clearly showed the partial outline of a human being. This person had avoided a direct hit from the bottle, but the spray had still hit him.

"That paint will not come off easily! Now come out!"

The figure responded to Fujiko's harsh words by beginning to move. The pattern on the wall slid to the side. As it moved further and further away, the color itself began to change. It went from the look and feel of gray stone to the look and feel of black rubber.

Finally, a man made fully of rubber and with extremely long arms and legs appeared.

"So you did make your way in here!"

Fujiko immediately threw a Molotov cocktail, but Rubbers quickly avoided it by clinging to the wall and leaping from there up to the ceiling. Fujiko was not skilled at direct magical attacks, but she was still shocked by his speed.

Rubbers remained attached to the ceiling and did not come down. He really did possess skills suited for infiltration. And on top of that, his skill in combat had already been proven in his battle with the Hattori family.

—We have to lose him before we exit the school building!

Fujiko pulled a whip out of the leather bag. She stretched it between her hands, producing a nice cracking noise. She then attacked Rubbers with it.

Surprisingly, Rubbers did not avoid this attack. The whip made perfect contact with his body and produced a dry noise similar to cloth tearing.

—Eh?

Fujiko was surprised at how well that had gone, but her expression ultimately froze over.

The whip had left an obvious mark on Rubbbers's rubber body, but when he reached out a hand and ran his fingers over the depression, his entire body trembled in delight.

"Wh-what?"

Fujiko swung the whip some more. Rubbers still did not avoid the whip. In fact, he seemed to twist his body around so the whip would hit every single part of his body. Each time another whip mark was added to his body, he seemed to trembling joyfully.

"Wh-what a disturbing person…"

Fujiko stopped swinging her whip around. She doubted it was doing any damage.

When she did, Rubbers spread his arms and legs and began advancing as if to say it had not been enough. The way he swayed back and forth made it clear he wanted the whip.

Fujiko did not know if he was the type to take pleasure in pain, if he was showing off his immortal body, or if he was trying to provoke her, but it robbed her of all will to fight and she felt fear run down her spine.

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-what should we do?"

Keena was actually panicked for once.

"There is nothing we can do!"

Fujiko was unsure what course of action to choose.

Rubbers advanced greedily, but he suddenly stopped. Once he realized the whip was not coming, he bent over as if pouting. But that only lasted an instant. He leaped intensely as if his displeasure had led to rage. He leapt as quickly as compressed rubber springing back into place. He bounced off the ceiling, circled around behind the Cerberus, and stretched his hand out toward Keena. He was planning to snatch Keena as he landed behind them.

Fujiko was not used to physical battles, so she was unable to react even though she realized what Rubbers was trying to do.

"No…!"

Fujiko could only turn around. As she did, Rubbers's hand reached Keena's waist.

"Kyaaaah!" screamed Keena.

And then…

"Bat Storm!"

As that high-pitched voice rang out, something like a black wind snatched Keena away an instant before Rubbers could.

Keena floated up into the air and slipped from Rubbers's grasp. She stopped in midair in front of the Cerberus. She was wrapped in what looked like black cloth.

"What was that?" asked Fujiko in surprise.

The cloth wrapped around Keena began to wriggle. What had looked like cloth was actually a collection of bats. They lowered Keena to the ground, scattered, and began to gather next to Keena.

The bats were gathering inside the cape worn by a pale girl who had appeared there at some point.

"I am the student council vice president, Ootake Michie. I am here on the president's orders, arinsu."

Michie gave an elegant greeting and drew a long, narrow sword.

"Vice president!"

"I don't remember you from the student council."

Fujiko was surprised, but Keena sounded more confused.

"I do not blend into the background that much, arinsu. Although it is true us three officers do come as a set, arinsu," complained Michie. She then faced Rubbers and held her sword out horizontally. "At any rate, the president refuses to be honest with herself, but she sent me to save you, arinsu. I will show you what I can do, arinsu!"

Michie allowed the Cerberus to escape behind her and swung her sword. A violent wind suddenly shot from the sword. It was a combination attack that used the magical wind with the mechanical bats mixed in. Rubbers was attacked by the storm of bats with sharp blades that had troubled Akuto so much in the underground crypt.

Rubbers received almost no damage from the blades, but he was still blown backwards. This attack was perfect for stopping an enemy in a narrow passageway like this. Even if the magical wind could be counteracted, the non-magical mechanical bats were difficult to stop.

"Now, I have bought you some time. Use this chance to-…" began Michie.

But the instant she turned around, she was left speechless.

Fujiko and Keena were also at a loss for words. Bouichirou stood before the Cerberus.

He was wearing white, but he seemed to be enveloped in the aura of the grim reaper.

"You may not like it if I say I have come for you, but I need you. Please understand that," said Bouichirou.

Fujiko was too afraid to speak, but Keena suddenly produced a dignified voice.

"What you are doing may be admirable, but I am not the one you need."

Those words seemed to be quite a shock to Bouichirou. He seemed to falter for the first time.

"Why…do you say that?"

"Your heart lies elsewhere. I have monitored this world, the changing of the seasons, and the changes of this world's people, so I know. I have of course been monitoring you as well," said Keena as if she were dreaming.

Obvious panic appeared on Bouichirou's face.

"Even if that is the case, I must act for the sake of all mankind! Please leave my personal feelings until later!" he said before leaping forward.

His speed was on an entirely different level from Rubbers's. Fujiko did not even have time to speak. The next thing she knew, Bouichirou was standing next to her on the Cerberus's back.

"Ah…It can't be…"

By the time Fujiko was finally able to speak, Bouichirou had knocked Keena unconscious by gently touching the back of her neck. He lifted her up in his arms.

"This is likely my final chance. If you have any human decency, please do not interrupt me," he said to Fujiko before jumping back to his original location.

Fujiko felt as if Bouichirou's words had released her from the curse of the fear binding her. Anger welled up from the bottom of her heart.

"Even if there are people who have lost their lives because of you!?" she shouted.

She tried to swing her whip, but Bouichirou jumped further back.

"Who is the one that awakened the demon king and increased the damage he did!? Who do you think has harmed more people!?"

"Do not use that reasoning on me!"

Fujiko swung her whip, but jumped away from its tip and disappeared down the passageway while still holding Keena.

"Damn him!" cried Fujiko.

She struck the Cerberus's back to have it pursue him, but she heard a scream from behind her.

"No! I give up!"

"Eh?"

Fujiko had forgotten about them, but it seemed Michie was failing to hold Rubbers back. She turned around and a tremendous scene lay before her eyes. Rubbers had stretched his body enough to completely block the passageway. It looked as if a rubber membrane had been placed inside a cylinder. Michie's wind did nothing more than stretch Rubbers's body.

"This is my limit! My wind is going to stop!" said Michie bitterly.

"What? Do you have any idea what will happen if you stop now?"

Fujiko panicked, but Michie already knew that.

"Not good!"

Michie ran out of strength. The wind stopped. Rubbers's body snapped back and that reaction caused him to shoot toward Michie and Fujiko.

"Wah!"

While curled up into a ball, Rubbers flew like a bullet toward Michie on the ground and Fujiko atop the Cerberus. He bounced around the walls, ceiling, and floor at all sorts of angles.

He finally came to a stop, but Rubbers now stood before Fujiko as if to prevent her from pursuing Bouichirou.

"It seems we cannot do anything without defeating him first," muttered Fujiko in disgust.

The battle had fallen into chaos, but the soldiers were given courage by the rumors of the demon king's defeat and the obvious collapse of the demonic beasts' teamwork.

Fujiko was unable to provide instructions and Akuto's control had vanished, so the demonic beasts did nothing more than attack the enemy before their eyes. However, this made them easier to handle for the soldiers. Not that much effort was needed to defeat the demonic beasts when they attacked sporadically. As long as they did not approach the school building, the soldiers did not need to face a large number of demonic beasts.

At this point, Eiko was certain of her victory. The smile on her face was more out of relief than joy and she spoke pleasantly to 2V.

"How about we give a bonus to the crew of the Genkaku?"

"Yes, that might be good," replied 2V offhandedly.

He was more focused on the report he had received from Rubbers.

—So victory is almost assured. But in that case, this girl is only in the way. I can't have her winning too much.

2V glanced over at Eiko.

At the same moment, a voice came from the telepathic communicator. Eiko answered it.

<A human is opposing us in front of the main entrance. We cannot stop her,> said a Teruya family soldier.

"That student council president!? You still haven't dealt with her!?" roared Eiko.

<She is stronger than we expected.>

"I can't send you reinforcements. That would bring shame to my family. Is that all you contacted me about?" replied Eiko with a look of displeasure.

<No, the enemy is claiming you killed your father.>

"What?"

Eiko looked completely shocked at this announcement.

And 2V was surprised by it was well.

—Oh? Now this is convenient. It seems her luck has run out.

But Eiko's response was a surprising one.

"Make sure you kill her! Don't let her near the cameras. Make especially sure she stays away from the Hattori family. The reporters are always loitering around there!"

—Were those from her family already aware before they swore their allegiance?

2V was secretly surprised and Eiko continued speaking.

"I will send in reinforcements. Make absolutely sure you take care of her. If you handle this well, we will be unstoppable."

After Eiko ended the telepathic connection, 2V spoke up.

"Are the Teruya family soldiers okay with this?"

"Manipulating someone's mind requires having them drink potions over a long period of time, but that is perfectly possible for those working for your family," explained Eiko with a grin.

"I see. So you were already prepared."

"If I was not, I would not have killed my father."

2V secretly turned a cold look toward Eiko.

—This girl really is dangerous. It does not look like I can make use of her. Now, what to do?

2V began hurriedly putting together a strategy.

"Take this!"

Several fists flew from Lily and struck several armored warriors simultaneously. They were all knocked flying backwards and collapsed in a circle around Lily. More of the Teruya family armored warriors and other

soldiers formed another circle beyond them. The short girl before them was too much of a threat to lay a hand on.

The normal soldiers forming yet another circle around the Teruya family ones were unsure if they should even attack since the target was not a demonic beast. Lily used that to her advantage.

Lily moved forward and the circle of armored warriors moved accordingly. After that slow movement, Lily dashed forward and began fighting the armored warriors who had acted reflexively.

Lily's outstretched arms twisted around and avoided the armored warriors' swords, and her fists acted as a counter as they sank into the faces of those armored warriors.

She had repeated this same pattern several times, but the armored warriors' morale had remained oddly intact. They were cautious of Lily, but they showed no sign of falling back.

—Have they been brainwashed? They're just too energetic.

Even Lily was being placed in a mental crisis.

"Teruya Eiko killed her father who was the head of the family!"

Lily had made that announcement a few times already.

However, the armored warriors did not seem remotely bothered by it. In fact, they used the time Lily took to speak as a chance to attack. As she knocked them away, Lily began to catch on to what was happening.

—Completely brainwashing someone with magic is difficult. You have to use the kind of potion Etou Fujiko used before. Did she give them potions and train them constantly? In that case, she might be opposed to it getting out to the media, but that is only a temporary thing. If she has enough supporters, this will end with her covering it all up. It looks like the simplest plan really is the best: I need to go and kick Teruya Eiko's ass.

Lily looked across the schoolyard before her. Eiko's tent was a good distance away.

One hundred armored warriors stood before her. Five hundred unharmed Teruya family ninja stood behind them. All of them had narrowed their focus down to Lily alone.

The total number of enemies was 600.

And Lily was completely on her own.

—I knew it was going to come to this…but it isn't looking good now that I'm actually standing in front of them.

Lily was not the kind of person who forced herself past her limits in order to show off or for appearances. She was the type who acted without thinking and would all of a sudden realize she had forced herself past her limits.

—Well, whatever. I started this fight. I was right to send the three officers to rescue Soga Keena. I can't ask them to do this. Now, then…

Lily charged toward the armored warriors at the front.

She punched and kicked and punched and punched and punched.

She sent countless fists flying forward and advanced as if carving through a solid wall.

—If I keep this up, I can overcome their recovery speed!

If she kept the punches coming with overwhelming speed, the armored warriors' defenses and recovery magic would be of no use. That kind of impulsive thinking worked here.

Lily broke through the circle of armored warriors and charged into the five hundred members of the Teruya ninja forces. Several ninja leaped at her simultaneously and began attacking in three-dimensional cooperation, but she sent countless fists around her body without bothering to aim. She created a spherical attack field around her. That space was filled with randomly flying blows that would immediately knock back anyone who came into contact with them.

—Attack more and more! Deflect any and all incoming attacks! I can break through!

As she focused her mind, Lily charged forward. The Teruya ninja forces did not respond with fair armed combat like the armored warriors had. They fired flaming spheres with magic, threw other projectiles, and created magical smoke to rob Lily of her vision.

But she shook it all off with nothing but her onslaught of mana-filled fists.

"Ohhhhhhhhh!"

That single sphere continued to advance while blowing away the crowd.

Sending out those countless fists rapidly exhausted her physical strength. Would Lily's strength give out first or would she break through first?

—I'm almost at my limit… But I can make it!

The pace of her attacks dropped and she had to start aiming her fists, but she could see the end of the surrounding Teruya ninja forces ahead of her. Two hundred of them had already been knocked unconscious, another hundred had been knocked out of the fight, and two hundred of those remaining were behind her.

—I…broke through!

Lily's vision opened up before her. She was only 100 meters from Eiko's tent. No obstacles remained between her and it.

"Prepare yourself, Teruya Eiko!"

But Eiko showed no sign of worry.

"I said to send in reinforcements!"

Eiko gave an order and more soldiers spread out around Lily.

These five companies, totaling 500 in all, had been held in reserve and had not taken part in the demonic beast hunt at all.

"That is the school's student council president. In order to help the demon king, she has committed the great crime of spreading lies that I killed my father, the high priest. I am sure some of you may doubt me, but that is why I will not order you to kill her. Capture her!"

The soldiers seemed to accept Eiko's explanation. Their rifles had bayonets attached and they held them toward Lily.

For Lily, this was like having a thick wall appear before her.

The soldiers lined up next to each other which created a certain thickness, and the soldiers lined up behind them stuck their bayonets through the gaps in the first row.

The bayonet-covered wall slowly advanced toward her.

—Tch. My strength is just about at its limit. I wanted to maintain enough strength to take on Eiko, but it looks like my spirit is giving out.

Lily looked left and right. Similar walls had been created on either side as well.

Each wall was made up of about 100 soldiers. And behind her, the Teruya family ninja were beginning to recover.

—If I try to fly, it will only make me a target for the guns in the back. And more importantly, I don't want to waste the strength.

The fact that the soldiers were advancing slowly was the only piece of fortune for Lily. That was because they were not sure Lily was a villain, so they were only trying to capture her. However, it made Lily feel like she was being slowly tormented to death.

—Tch… Is this it?

Just as Lily almost gave up and fell to her knees, she heard a scream from behind.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeee!"

—Hm?

Lily glanced over her shoulder to see a fur ball flying toward her at tremendous speed. It was as if someone had thrown a baseball toward her. And the scream was coming from the fur ball itself.

"Wha-?"

Lily shrank down in shock.

The soldiers around her stopped moving in surprise.

With a loud crash, the fur ball landed and sent dust into the air.

"Ow ow ow ow ow ow…"

The fur ball squirmed as it spoke. Eventually, legs extended from the fur, the entire thing shook, and it became a wolf-like beast a bit larger than a human.

"Arnoul really threw me, gya…" said the wolf.

"Kanna," said Lily with a grin.

Lily's grin grew to a full smile.

The wolf's true identity was Kamiyama Kanna. She was the student council treasurer. Her special characteristic was her ability to transform.

Kanna turned back in the direction she had flown in from. A giant suit of Western armor three times the size of a normal human stood to the side of the school building. That armor seemed to have thrown Kanna because it was in the follow through pose of a baseball pitch. Inside that battle armor was the secretary Arnoul.

"You two…" Lily's softening expression stiffened. "I told you to rescue Soga Keena."

"Yeah, but Michie went to take care of that, gya. Don't act so distant, gya. I know what you are thinking, gya."

Kanna showed off her teeth in a smile.

"You idiot. Now how do you plan to get out of this situation?"

"I hadn't thought of that, gya. I guess I'm the same as you, gya."

"I see." Lily showed off her teeth in a smile as well. "Now I feel like an idiot for running out of strength. I'm so close. Let's just go on a rampage for as long as we can, okay?"

"That's what I came here to do, gya. This looks like a lot of fun, gya."

Kanna howled toward the heavens like a wolf.

—So she is forcing her way in. In that case, it might be best to let the student council president's group win here.

2V began making plans based on assumptions.

—Eiko has announced that this talk of her patricide is nonsense. That will hold for now, but she must be planning to alter the records once Bouichirou's plan succeeds. That is a decent plan, but there will still be soldiers who do not believe it. Maybe I can introduce more chaos through that opening.

2V focused his mind.

The dolls he controlled were mixed into various units. He had some in the units hunting down demonic beasts, some in the units on standby, and some in the medical units in the rear.

"Hey, did you hear? The enemy claims the high priest's daughter killed him to take his position."

"I thought the demon king killed the high priest."

"But don't a lot of Teruya Eiko's actions seem suspicious?"

"Maybe…but orders are orders."

2V's dolls began similar conversations throughout the units. The soldiers were of course faithful to their duty. They would obey their orders even with certain doubts about their commander. Even so, the rumor still spread in the form of doubt. It created the sparks needed for an explosion.

Lily and Kanna's combination was producing splendid results. Lily would charge recklessly forward and Kanna would follow. They took the opposite actions to what their appearances would suggest and they easily handled the soldiers around them.

"Take this: Special Spherical Beating!"

Lily was back. Even if her naming sense for techniques was lacking, her mental strength had recovered.

She created a sphere of countless fists around her and sent enemy after enemy flying away. With Kanna jumping around sealing up any blind spots, she was not forced to fill up as much unneeded space as before. This preserved her mental strength which both allowed her to continue fighting longer and to increase her attack strength.

"These are normal soldiers! They can't use magic!"

"If you get close, you'll get hurt, gya!"

Kanna charged forward at speeds too great for human reflexes to handle. Even if it was before he had awoken, these movements had been too much for Akuto. The soldiers backed away and fired their rifles, but Kanna would be gone by the time they had aimed. The bullets never even came near her and oftentimes hit one of the other soldiers. They grew impatient and fired on Lily as well, but Kanna quickly acted as a shield and stopped the bullets. Her supple and tough fur could easily deflect a bullet.

"Heh. Not much farther to Teruya Eiko!"

"They couldn't put up much of a fight, gya!"

Lily and Kanna continued their surging onslaught.

"This is a disgrace to the name of Kouga! What are you doing!?" Eiko roared into the telepathic communicator.

The command tent was located at a slightly raised portion a short distance from the schoolyard, but Lily had almost breached the schoolyard. It was difficult for normal soldiers to stop a magic expert.

<We are being stopped by a giant suit of armor. We are doing everything we can, but…>

Eiko had of course seen the situation. The ridiculously powerful and giant armor that had thrown the beast was slowly moving toward the Teruya ninja forces and the armored warriors. And Eiko was aware of just how strong it was. It would be difficult to stop even with several ninja.

"Send the Hattori family in to capture the student council president!" announced Eiko.

As 2V watched from the side, he saw this as an excellent opportunity.

—Some sacrifices must be made, is that it? If you send in Yuuko's unit, the odds are high the rumors of your patricide will reach the viewers across the country. That will make it quite difficult to suppress. I might be able to ensure Teruya Eiko can never recover from this.

Eiko remained perfectly oblivious to 2V's plotting.

"Find some reason to call Hattori Yuuko to my tent," ordered Eiko before ending the telepathic conversation and grinning. "Now, Hattori Junko! It is time for you to work for me!"

"What…?"

Junko was at a loss for words.

She could not believe how unreasonable an order this was. She was being told to eliminate the student council president.

"There is a rumor spreading that you killed your father. Don't tell me this is an attempt to silence the president."

Junko feigned calm, but her lips trembled. The rumor had reached her not long before.

<Do I look like someone who would do that? We are in the middle of a battle. Hold your tongue.>

—I said that because you look like exactly that sort of person!

Junko left that unsaid and replied in a trembling voice.

"It is true that is not something one should say out in public. However, I cannot obey this order without a proper reason. The president is not a part of the demon king's army."

<I am not asking for your reasoning. Before giving this order, I had Yuuko-chan the idol called to my tent. And the media is with her. They were delighted to have a safe place to interview her.>

"Wh-what are you trying to say!?"

Junko frantically looked around, but Yuuko was indeed gone. The reporter and cameraman were missing as well.

<I do not know why the student council president is attacking us, but wouldn't it be lovely for the battlefield idol to be injured while protecting her commander?>

"Teruya Eiko!" shouted Junko.

—She is willing to go this far!?

It was now certain that she had gone as far as killing her own father to become the high priest. From her actions and the current situation, there was no doubting that. Junko now understood why Akuto was so angry.

—The position of high priest is meaningless now! No, this is just someone using that framework for their own purposes. I had heard the dark rumors about the head of the Teruya family, but I never knew it went this far! This entire war was started for Eiko's own selfish desires! And who knows how many of the previous battles were started for the convenience of the Teruya family! I cannot even imagine how many they have killed. I had

heard the dark rumors, but I thought it was necessary to maintain public order. But now…

"Men! This is an order! Stop everyone headed for the commander's tent!"

But she had no choice but to stop the student council president.

—I am an idiot. I continue to work to maintain the system that allows the high priest to control us.

Junko gave her orders to the Hattori ninja forces.

The ninja stopped hunting down the demonic beasts and began to move. Junko took the lead.

—Was Sai Akuto in the right? He caused all this to occur, but you could also say he was exposing the dark side of the Teruya family. Was he so angry because he knew of this? I want to speak with him…but…

When Junko had seen the aircraft carrier Genkaku crash into the school building along with Akuto and Peterhausen, she had of course been enveloped in despair. However, she had been saved by Yuuko's presence. The demonic beast blood affecting Yuuko proved that Akuto was still alive.

—If he is alive, he needs to hurry up and prove that he is the demon king! He needs to prove that he is an overwhelming existence that can overturn this rotten situation in a single blow!

"Why here?" asked Yuuko in confusion after being called in by Eiko.

Being called back was perfectly natural if she was to stay away from the demonic beasts and distance herself from her mission, but she was confused by being given nothing other than an interview to do.

"Peace will arrive now that the demon king is gone, won't it?"

The reporter pointed his microphone toward Yuuko once they arrived in the safe area. He did not seem to have noticed Lily. He may have thought it was just a small skirmish or he may have had no grasp of the battle situation whatsoever.

"The battle is not over yet, so don't let your guard down."

Yuuko, on the other hand, had an excellent grasp of the battle situation. She could tell something was wrong. Her location was not all that safe and there was something she of all people could know.

"And the demon king is still alive."

Yuuko's words sent a stir through those around her.

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"It's just my intuition…but I can tell. Ah!"

Yuuko stopped speaking and stared into the distance.

The Hattori family forces and Lily had begun staring each other down on the battlefield.

"My sister," she said while pointing toward Junko.

Eiko could tell the situation had begun to move, so she had the cameraman and reporter fall back.

"Excuse me, but this area might be dangerous. Please fall back for a short while."

After driving out the media, Eiko stood directly behind Yuuko and happily watched Junko and Lily face off.

Lily ended her advance when this formidable enemy appeared. Even Lily was beginning to show fatigue. She could manage against normal soldiers, but the Hattori ninja would be difficult with the little strength left to her.

Lily was brought to a stop by an attack from one of the ninja and she spotted Junko who commanded them.

"You are a student at the academy, aren't you? Why are you blocking my way? You don't believe what Teruya Eiko says, do you?"

Lily spoke to Junko as she stopped Kanna who had suddenly stood up.

A look of anguish appeared on Junko's face and she turned back toward the tent. Junko said nothing, but Lily picked up on the situation.

"Oh, so she has a hostage, does she? But even if she didn't, you still couldn't disobey the Teruya family given what family you belong to."

Lily's mocking tone brought Junko's emotions to the surface.

"If you understand, then why would you say those things!?"

"Heh. I suppose you're right. That was mean of me," said Lily with a grin.

"I might be able to control myself, but my men can be short-tempered. I cannot guarantee your survival!"

Junko raised her voice and the Hattori family ninja rushed toward Lily as if that had been their cue.

"Iga Ninja Art – Five Direction Magic Circle Formation!"

This five-man simultaneous attack had not worked on Akuto, but Lily did not have the strength left to attack repeatedly. She managed to knock down two of them, but she allowed the remaining three to reach her. Kanna slipped in front of Lily, but she also only managed to stop and knock away two of them. The final one circled behind Lily and attacked with his sword.

"Gh…"

Lily's knees gave out. She swung a fist behind her as she fell, but the ninja jumped away before it arrived.

"You must be…taking me lightly to attack with the back of the sword. I don't like…being pitied," complained Lily.

"Please stop here, president. We might still be able to do something about all this."

Junko had calmed down a bit, so she tried to persuade Lily to stop. But Lily of course refused to listen.

"You idiot. I'm not going to listen to your naïve crap. I will do what I think is right no matter what. I don't care about what family anyone is from or what other people think. Whether someone is a good person, a weak person, or a comrade, they deserve death if they support something that is wrong."

Lily stood up.

"Kh," groaned Junko.

If she swung down her arm, the Hattori ninja forces would begin to attack without hesitation.

"Do it."

With a smile on her face, Eiko reached into her pocket. Yuuko sat directly in front of her. If Eiko pulled out the blade in her pocket, she could decapitate Yuuko in an instant.

Eiko knew that Junko was already watching her.

And 2V calmly watched the scene unfold.

—Now, then. This looks like a good opportunity.

Without letting it show on his face, he focused his mind.

2V's dolls began to move.

Junko squeezed her eyes shut and swung down her arm.

The Hattori ninja forces charged forward.

"Iga Ninja Art – Five Direction Magic Cir-…!"

But they were unable to complete their technique.

"Gh!"

"Wah!"

The ninja cried out and fell to the ground.

"What happened?"

Junko looked around.

To her surprise, the ninja had been taken out by normal soldiers.

"What is going on?"

Junko was confused.

Approximately five soldiers armed with rifles stood in a position to protect Lily and Kanna. Smoke rose from the barrels of their weapons. The ninja had been shot down.

But even as a surprise attack, it should have been near impossible for normal soldiers who could not use magic to hit ninja who were leaping through the air.

And Lily knew that quite well.

"Who are you?"

She turned a suspicious eye toward the soldiers who had protected her.

"Those who believe the truth of Teruya Eiko's patricide," one of the soldiers replied.

The soldiers then began to move. Three of them charged forward while the remaining two provided covering fire. Surprisingly the coordination of their movements was greater than that of the Hattori ninja forces.

"Impossible!" cried Junko in surprise, but that was the scene occurring before her eyes.

The five soldiers incapacitated one then another of the Hattori ninja forces.

"I can't enjoy this…"

Lily began walking toward Junko. The Hattori ninja had their hands full with those soldiers. At the moment, only Junko stood between Lily and Eiko's tent.

"What in the world is going on!?" asked Junko in utter confusion.

"I have heard there is a member of the Cabinet Intelligence and Magic Office that can use dolls. He is likely in the command tent. Now, I sympathize with your sister and I will rescue her if I can, but don't hold a grudge if there's nothing I can do."

Lily took another step toward Junko.

"Kh…"

Junko understood it rationally. Eiko was the one at fault. However, there was nothing she could do about it.

—I have no choice but to fight here!

Junko made up her mind.

"Iga Ninja Art – Scattered Moonlight!"

Junko divided into two. The two Junkos attacked Lily simultaneously.

"Heh. I have two arms, you know?"

Lily gave a scornful laugh. The two Junkos attacked with a slight time delay, but Lily knocked them both to the ground with a single hand each.

—I-it can't be! She defeated me so easily!?

As Junko received countless attacks, she became painfully aware that her shaken brain was no longer able to give the orders needed to move her body.

—There is too much of a difference in our powers.

The two Junkos collapsed and one of them disappeared.

The student council president had easily defeated her in the past as well. Even so, she had not felt as powerless back then. The difference this time was that she could not protect anything without growing stronger.

—D-dammit…

She somehow managed to move her arm. She placed her hand on the Sword of Sohaya. However, she was still unable to draw it.

—Surely my feelings are powerful enough now. Is…is that not enough?

Junko shed tears of frustration.

"Teruya Eiko!"

Lily sprang toward Eiko.

"Y-you fool! Don't you care what happens to-…"

Eiko wrapped an arm around Yuuko's neck and drew a short sword, but Lily did not hesitate even slightly.

"Not really, no! If you kill her, I will take vengeance for her immediately afterwards!"

"Ahh!"

Eiko swung her short sword.

"Kyaaah!"

Yuuko's scream lingered in the air.

However…

"What!?"

"Oh!"

"Kyaaaah!"

Lily, Eiko, and Yuuko all cried out at the same moment.

A great wind had shot between the three of them.

Lily's fist was stopped by his back.

Eiko's short sword was stopped by the claws on his left hand.

And Yuuko was held within his right arm.

"I will keep my promise."

The one whispering to Yuuko was Brave.

"Brave!" cried Yuuko in utter joy.

"We will be travelling a fair distance from here, but everything will be okay," said Brave Hiroshi as he flew up from the tent and into the sky.

He moved so quickly that Lily, Eiko, and 2V were all unable to react.

Yamato Bouichirou stood in midair.

Hiroshi lined up next to him with Yuuko in his arms. Bouichirou stood atop a giant sword. The sword seemed able to fly. And Bouichirou also held a girl in his arms. It was Keena.

"Did you wish to save that girl?"

Hiroshi nodded.

"This is what I wanted the suit back for. This is why I agreed to cooperate with you," said Hiroshi.

"I do not need you to fully sympathize with me. I only need some help from you," said Bouichirou.

He flew away from the battlefield and Hiroshi followed.

"I don't know what that was, but I'm not going to complain!"

A cruel smile appeared on Lily's lips.

Realizing she had nothing left to protect herself, Eiko's face twisted in fear. After all, she had seen Junko's instant defeat. She knew Junko was just about as strong as she was and she was not foolish enough to not understand just how powerful Lily was.

"2V!"

Eiko turned to 2V for help, but he remained seated with a thin smile on his face.

"Give up!" roared Lily.

Countless fists flew toward Eiko.

"Doraaaaah!"

Lily pummeled Eiko as if this would be her last chance. Even as Eiko collapsed like a wooden doll, Lily continued the storm of punches.

"Dorrraaaaaah!"

Eiko's body became as battered as an old rag.

"P-president! Wait, gya!" cried Kanna once she finally caught up.

"Hm?"

Lily finally stopped once she noticed something was wrong.

"Damn!"

Lily was punching a piece of lumber with Eiko's coat over it.

"A replacement! She's good at running if nothing else!"

Lily clenched her teeth.

"Ha ha," laughed 2V lightly.

When Lily glared over at him, he apologized, continued to laugh, and pointed into the distance. Eiko could be seen running toward the Teruya ninja forces.

"Are you really going to throw it all away and start over after coming so far!?" cried Lily.

"You must have had a hard time of it. Excellent work," said 2V. Lily began glaring at him once more and he shrugged. "I doubt she can bring together an army anymore. It seems you have some proof of her patricide, so there is no need to get so angry."

"Are you the one known as 2V?"

"Please do not act so hostile. How about we work together? At the moment, the Intelligence and Magic Office wants the same thing you do: the defeat of the demon king and the fall of the Teruya family. Don't both seem perfectly realistic with a little help from us? You hand over your information and we will spread it around. That will resolve everything."

2V's voice remained perfectly cheerful and light.

"I don't like you. I don't like you at all," said Lily in a low voice.

She understood his reasoning. If she did as 2V said, it was over for Eiko whether the demon king was alive or not. If command was passed on to whoever came after Eiko (in this case, that would be the captain of Genkaku), the situation could be resolved.

However…

"Peace or a resolution to this situation are not what I want. I have been doing some investigation and I have reason to believe the Cabinet Intelligence and Magic Office is trying to overthrow the empire. I have reason to believe CIMO 8 is disobeying its own leader and merely using its leader's mysterious ambitions for their own purposes," said Lily.

2V laughed in pure amusement.

"Ha ha ha ha! That was some excellent investigation! We were as appalled as anyone when we heard what Mr. Bouichrou planned to do. But we began to wonder if there was something he had not realized. And you will never believe what we found: a mountain of treasure! He is getting worked up for nothing but his own personal reasons. In that case, we have no reason to obey him if there is nothing in it for us!"

"Then tell me what your reason is. What reason do you have that is more important than a conflict between the gods and the demon king!"

"I asked you not to be so hostile. If you help me, I can share that secret with you."

"Shut up. I'm a bit stubborn, you know?"

"What a pain. You are as troublesome as you are short."

"You just ensured your death with those words."

While 2V laughed, Lily's voice lowered. She brought a hand to the brim of her stylish hat. She pulled the brim to the side to reverse the hat. The smiling face pattern dyed into the hat's fabric changed to an angry face. This was the sign that she was overcome by too much anger to restrain herself.

"But a conflict here earns you nothing!" complained 2V.

He called back the dolls that had been fighting the Hattori family and had them rush Lily.

"President!" warned Kanna with what was almost a scream.

Lily barely had any strength left and Kanna knew it.

"Shut up! I won't be satisfied until I use my greatest technique!"

Lily's arms stretched out. As they dangled down to her left and right, she began swinging them around. However, she was not swinging them around as an attack. Her stretched arms wrapped around her body and squeezed tightly. She was building up power.

2V's dolls attacked Lily, but she jumped up and away from them with her arms still wrapped around her body. She then released the stored up power toward 2V who was still seated.

"Go! This is my greatest and hardest punch! I call it 'The Hard Punch'!"

Lily's body began to spin and her right fist flew at tremendous speed.

Her fist broke the sound barrier and produced a great boom.

2V's dolls moved in the path of the fist.

"Second stage: acceleration!"

Instead of doing anything with her outstretched right arm, Lily released her left arm from her body to increase her rotation.

A pure white ring of vapor began to trail behind her right fist. The air instantly compressed by the surface of the fist was released behind the fist and the moisture in it froze.

One of 2V's dolls used its lack of pain to act as a shield, but Lily's fist broke through its abdomen almost too easily.

"What!?"

This shocked 2V. He sent more dolls into the fist's path, but they were all pierced through by Lily's fist.

"Oh!"

2V's eyes opened wide as Lily's fist jabbed into his stomach. 2V remained frozen in place for a moment and then collapsed from the chair.

"Heh."

Lily retracted her arm and landed. 2V's dolls fell to the ground shortly thereafter.

"I definitely can't use another one of those. And I was hoping to save it for the demon king."

Lily walked over to 2V, but her expression clouded over.

"What…is this…?"

Lily grabbed 2V's hair and tugged at his head to lift it up. She then slammed that head against the ground.

"He's a doll, too!"

"R-really, gya?"

Kanna approached to check. The hole in 2V's abdomen was filled with machinery.

"Ha ha ha ha…"

2V, or the doll that had played the role of 2V, laughed. Its face was completely expressionless, so it was as creepy as seeing a corpse begin to laugh.

"Where are you controlling him from!?" roared Lily.

However, 2V replied with a mocking voice.

"That would be a secret! But with this doll out of commission, the others will cease to function as well. I stuck a booster in this one. Ha ha ha. If the two of us are unlucky, perhaps we will meet again. Of course, you would not recognize me if you did. As you can see, I have no face. Ha ha ha. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha."

Only 2V's eerie laughter remained as his doll ceased to function.

"Dammit!"

Lily stomped on the doll's head.

"Are you a clown!? I can't stand that!"

"C-calm down, president. More importantly, your strength is not going to last, gya. She may have little political power left, but Teruya Eiko did escape, gya. We need to do something, gya," said Kanna in an attempt to pacify Lily.

"Dammit. But I'm already out of strength."

Lily returned her hat to normal and leaned up against Kanna's wolf back.

"Why do you never think of the consequences of your actions, gya?"

"Shut up. I'll head out again after I get some rest. More importantly, do you have anything to eat?"

"Someone ate my stash of snacks in the student council room, gya."

"Oh, so the headmaster never replaced those potato chips."

"The headmaster ate it? That's a problem, gya. …Wait, president! Something's happening at the school, gya!"

Kanna raised her voice.

Lily looked over and saw a commotion running through the soldiers gathered round where Genkaku had crashed into the building.

Meanwhile, Rubbers was causing problems for Fujiko and Michie by blocking their path.

"Do you think we might not be able to defeat him?" asked Michie in a dark voice.

When the students had tried to enter an underground crypt in the past, Michie had sent almost all of them to the hospital. The fact that this girl was growing fainthearted worried Fujiko.

"I-if you are this fainthearted, senpai, why were you the only one that came here!?"

"With my mechanical bats and my wind, I am unbeatable in these underground passageways! …Or so I thought."

Rubbers's entire body was made of rubber, so far too many attacks were ineffective against him.

Rubbers was slowly moving toward them and it seemed he wanted them to attack him. Without being able to read his expression, they had no way of knowing whether he insisted on only sending their own attacks back at them or if he enjoyed being attacked.

Fujiko and Michie slowly backed away.

"D-do you have any useful magic?"

"If I did, I would have used it already!" complained Fujiko. "I am a normal student in everything but potions!"

"Ahh… That is not something to be proud of," commented Michie.

At that point, it seemed even Rubbers ran out of patience.

His speed suddenly increased as if he had been given a burst of energy.

"Ee!"

"Hyah!"

Rubbers crossed with Fujiko's Cerberus at tremendous speed. Without the Cerberus's quick reflex, they could never have avoided the attack.

"There is nothing we can do, arinsu."

"No… That might not be true."

Michie had fallen to despair, but Fujiko seemed to have had an idea.

"Did you think of something?"

"If we can escape to my underground lab…"

"I think I can manage that," said Michie as she fired her bats and wind toward Rubbers.

A surprising change came over Rubbers. He stretched himself out as thin as he could to become a flat surface and he attached to the floor.

"Ee! That is too creepy!"

"Quit complaining and climb on! We're going to run!"

Michie mounted the Cerberus and Fujiko instructed it to run.

Rubbers pursued them as a flat surface. He looked like a puddle of liquid spilled on a slanted floor. He was not all that fast, but if he grew too far away, he would wait until Michie's wind died down, turn into a ball, and bounce forward to fill the gap.

"He's going to catch up! I can't keep up this focus any longer, arinsu!"

"You have really been slipping with your speech pattern… Anyway, you only need to use magic to drive him back when he gets too close!"

"I-is that so, arinsu? You're so smart."

"I get the feeling you are mocking me. More importantly, we are almost there! Please keep it up just a bit longer!"

"Okay!"

With those words, Michie mustered up some strength and somehow managed to push Rubbers back once more.

The Cerberus slid to a stop in front of Fujiko's underground laboratory.

"Keep him back for just a bit longer!"

Fujiko jumped down from the Cerberus and ran into the laboratory. Michie was shocked.

"Ah…Ah ya ya ya ya… Wait. I have to do this alone, arinsu?"

"I will be right back!"

"Eee! Please don't just run away!"

Rubbers leaped toward the fearful Michie. She somehow managed to send out a group of bats to block the attack, but Rubbers stopped all of the bats with his body. The bats sank into his stretching body. They stretched his body far enough to jut out the other side, but it was not enough to break his strong skin.

"Wait… This is bad!"

Michie realized her strength had run out. She sent out some wind, but it was not enough to stop Rubbers.

Rubbers reached out his hand.

"Ee!"

Michie covered her face with her hands.

But Rubbers's hand never reached Michie.

"I have to say, I pulled this together quite quickly," said Fujiko with a grin.

She held what looked like a silver compressed gas cylinder in both hands. White smoke was floating up from the valve sticking from its opening.

Michie looked back at Rubbers.

The same smoke floating up from the cylinder was floating up from Rubbers's outstretched hand. Rubbers's hand was white and frozen solid.

"What did you do, arinsu?"

"This is liquid nitrogen! He may be able to defend against magical drops in temperature, but he cannot stop this with mana!"

Fujiko twisted the valve and sprayed the liquid toward Rubbers. Rubbers tried to put up a shield using mana, but Fujiko used a spell of her own to shatter that shield.

"You never need to defend, so I guessed making shields would not be your strong point. And it looks like I was right!"

As the liquid nitrogen washed across Rubbers, he let out a voiceless cry. Half of his body turned white as it froze and lost its elasticity.

"Vice president, attack now!"

"Sure thing!"

Michie fired her mechanical bats. As they flew from under her cape, the sharp blades attached to their wings attacked Rubbers. His tough skin had stopped those blades before, but now they easily left wounds.

"It's working!"

Michie focused the bats on Rubbers's frozen half. Repeated dry sounds rang out as the bats shattered Rubbers's body little by little.

Rubbers let out a bizarre cry. He mustered all his strength in his usable half and stretched it as far as he could. The situation suggested this was Rubbers's final attack that used everything he had.

"Is that all you can do!?"

Fujiko jumped back and avoided it. However, Rubbers had not been targeting Fujiko. His arm stretched to the Cerberus and reached into the bag attached to the saddle.

"Eh?"

Fujiko was confused, but she cried out in surprise and panic when she saw what Rubbers held as he retracted his arm.

"Oh, no!"

Rubbers had swiped the jar containing the cultivated piece of Akuto's body. That was the source of Fujiko's control over the demonic beasts.

Fujiko twisted the liquid nitrogen valve once more, but Rubbers abandoned the frozen half of his body. He stretched his body and the frozen portion broke off. With only half his body remaining, Rubbers accelerated by bouncing and fled down the passageway with the jar in his arm.

Fujiko did not have the strength to pursue him and it was obvious she would never catch up to him even if she did.

"What was that jar, arinsu?" asked Michie.

"You do not need to know," replied Fujiko with a shake of her head.

However, Fujiko understood what it meant that Rubbers had stolen it. Losing control over the demonic beasts was not that much of a problem at this point. However, that jar could be used to research Akuto's mana waves. Fujiko did not know what that would be used for, but it could lead to something terrible.

"A-at any rate, we fought off the enemy. It is time we checked on the situation," said Fujiko while feigning calm.

When Fujiko and Michie arrived at the spot at which the aircraft carrier Genkaku had crashed, they were surprised to find the headmaster helping Akuto to his feet. Joy immediately exploded within Fujiko.

"Ahh, so you were okay, Akuto-sama!"

Fujiko ran over as Akuto stood up.

"Yes. But that was definitely rough."

"If the black dragon had not saved him, he may have been in real danger. And if I had not used Kakei on the aircraft carrier, it may have been over for both of them," said the headmaster.

Some rubble collapsed and Peterhausen's face was visible inside. His head had a large wound. He was not bleeding, but that was simply due to the makeup of his body. The wound was clearly quite deep.

"Are you okay?" asked Akuto and Peterhausen shook his head.

"I make no habit of feigning strength. This will likely affect the fight from here on, so I will be honest. A few of my functions have likely been damaged. Even I can tell that something is wrong somewhere. I doubt it will affect my normal movement, but I cannot say what might happen when I support your magic."

"In that case, it may be no exaggeration to say we will be risking our lives," said Akuto sadly. He then spoke to Fujiko who was embracing him. "What is the situation?"

"I-I am sorry. Most of the demonic beasts have been routed. The soldiers are currently mopping the rest up. Also, Yamato Bouichirou abducted Soga Keena and went somewhere."

"Okay. Then I need to chase after him."

Akuto stood up and grimaced in pain.

"You mustn't! You need to fall back and rebuild your strength! You may not be able to use the academy as your stronghold, but you can easily make a new hideout with the support of the black magicians! If you do not survive, all will be lost!"

Fujiko clung to Akuto, but he embraced her head and whispered into her ear.

"You have it all wrong. Making sure all is lost is exactly what I am trying to do."

"Eh?"

Fujiko froze in place.

"Are you saying you plan to die, Akuto-sama?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought it through that far, but I suppose I will die in one meaning of the word. I may not lose my life, but if I prove that the gods can be killed, I might be able to eliminate at least some of this evil story

from the world. And if that happens, I will no longer be the demon king. I can't say what will happen after that," explained Akuto lightly.

"You mustn't! You are my hope! You saved me and gave me a reason to live!"

"But that just means you want to become a part of my story as the demon king. You want to deify an excellent system or a powerful individual, create a story around them, and rely on them. That will allow people to use that story to hurt others."

"But there are people who can be saved by it!"

"That is exactly why I must do this. I will of course save those I can save on my own. Senpai, if you watch me, I intend to live up to that."

"Akuto-sama…"

Fujiko looked up at Akuto with teary eyes.

Akuto sent a signal to Peterhausen with his eyes.

"Okay, let's go."

"Please wait! I will go, too!" proclaimed Fujiko, but Akuto shook his head.

"I cannot allow that. I don't know what is going to happen from here on out."

"But…" Fujiko raised her voice as if her suppressed feelings were exploding out. "Why Keena? You are pursuing her, aren't you!?"

"That is because she will strip me of my story."

Fujiko collapsed limply to the ground when she heard Akuto's answer.

"So that is the difference… But, Akuto-sama, once you return, I promise you I will-…"

Fujiko trailed off.

As Akuto began to walk away, the headmaster called out to him.

"Do your best. You can try out what I taught you."

"I will. I intend to try out the first one right away."

Akuto climbed over the rubble and the outside air caused his hair to flutter.

Screams and cries of surprise erupted from the soldiers outside.

"It's the demon king!"

"He's still alive!"

"Forget the demonic beasts! Get him!"

The voices were accompanied by bullets raining down on Akuto.

"There's…still just as many as before. I just hope they'll run away if I threaten them."

Akuto slid down the pile of rubble while deflecting the bullets with a hand as if he were swatting at bugs.

Not counting the Hattori ninja forces or the soldiers incapacitated by the aircraft carrier crash, over one thousand soldiers remained before his eyes. Akuto stood out in the open before those countless troops.

Akuto felt the soldiers' anger, malice, and fear pressing up against him.

"Now, I will bring an end to this rotten situation!"

Akuto jumped to the side and placed a hand on the spherical nose of the aircraft carrier that had knocked him out of the sky.

"He is…alive."

Junko raised her head. The Hattori ninja forces had been almost completely defeated. Counting the ninja who had helped her to her feet, she had only about 100 troops still able to fight. But no matter the situation, they would never forget their grudge against Akuto.

"Young lady! We may be injured and we may still have the Teruya family to deal with, but we must focus on the demon king if he is still alive!"

The Hattori ninja forces immediately began falling into formation and running toward the school building where Akuto was.

"W-wait!"

Junko ran after them.

—Alive… He is alive! But… But I know now that you are not my enemy!

As Junko cried out in her heart, her gaze was on Eiko. Eiko had abandoned her command and surrounded herself with the Teruya ninja forces. She was using the demon king's reappearance to distract everyone from her near-uncovered patricide. Normally, leaving her command post would qualify as dereliction of duty, but when the demon king was their only enemy, it almost looked as if she were taking command from a new position.

However, the Teruya ninja forces Eiko was fortified within were located a long distance from where Akuto had appeared. The Hattori ninja forces were even further away and were making their way toward Akuto. Those relative positions were due to the battle with Lily, but it was obvious Eiko was leaving the battle to other soldiers while she merely watched on.

—How cowardly are you!?

Junko gritted her teeth.

But Eiko was of course filled with scorn as she watched the approaching Hattori ninja forces.

"You incompetent fools! Hurry up and defeat the demon king!"

—Tch!

Junko reached for her short sword, but a ninja stopped her.

"Restrain yourself, young lady. Even if she did kill her father, any attack on her will be viewed as an assassination to take her position of power!"

"Ahh! And so I should stay silent and do what she says?"

Junko writhed in regret.

"Ah ha ha ha! Now this is funny!"

Eiko laughed as she watched on.

However, a dark shadow suddenly fell over them and Eiko turned around.

"E-ehhhhhh!?" cried Eiko in shock.

The aircraft carrier Genkaku was standing up perpendicular to the ground.

"I see. So this is how you use Kakei."

Akuto was impressed. He was holding Genkaku's spherical nose in both hands. The 350-meter aircraft carrier should have been too much for Akuto to hold, but he was easily lifting it up. He was of course assisting the process with mana telekinesis, but it was clearly all being done with his own power.

"Kakei sure is handy," said Akuto.

When Peterhausen heard that, he shrugged despite being a dragon.

"I am not an expert on this, but I get the feeling this is not Kakei."

"The headmaster said it involved using all of your muscles in cooperation. And I managed to do it, so it doesn't really matter!"

Akuto slowly tilted Genkaku. He let out a breath as he gathered energy and then swung the aircraft carrier like a bat.

It was as if a building lying on its side had started to roll. A roar swept across the ground and the aircraft carrier flew by horizontally.

The soldiers threw everything to the ground, leapt to the ground themselves, and prayed to their gods. Those who did not believe in the story of the gods could only despair. Those who did not get down on the ground were knocked away by the belly of the ship. Those lucky enough to get down in time were swept up by the wind create by Genkaku's passage and then they were slammed back into the ground.

In a single swing of that aircraft carrier, a military force of over one thousand was silenced. Akuto swung Genkaku back up, but its strength reached its limit at the peak of the swing and it broke in half.

The back half of Genkaku toppled onto the schoolyard while scattering fragments everywhere. An earthquake-like vibration and an explosion of dust spread from the impact point.

"That should just about do it."

Akuto tossed aside the front half of Genkaku. This created another vibration and explosion of dust, but no one trembled in fear or ran away this time. Everyone stared blankly at Akuto.

Everyone was left speechless when faced with that overwhelming strength and impossible power.

—Ahh! This is it! That overwhelming power! That strength that can overturn everything!

Junko stood in the schoolyard amid the wind that was still blowing through. She trembled as she felt like that wind was blowing through her very heart.

She knew the boy who had wielded that power. He was obtuse, insensitive, and sincere. And his attack had blown everything away just as she had hoped it would.

—I was right from the very beginning. I understood everything from the moment I first met him!

Junko began walking forward.

The only troops left unscathed were the Teruya ninja forces and the Hattori ninja forces who had been farther away from the school building. Eiko naturally shouted at Junko.

"Stop the demon king! That's an order!"

Junko grinned.

"You think that will work without your hostage?"

Eiko looked confused, but she quickly shook her head and pointed toward the Hattori ninja forces.

"Don't you dare act like I am a villain! Don't you all care about the honor of your young lady's family? If you oppose me here, your family is done for!"

One of the threatened ninja placed a hand on Junko's shoulder.

"Young lady. I understand you are angry, but our enemy here is the abominable demon king."

Junko silently shook off his hand and placed a hand on the Sword of Sohaya.

The sheath made a clicking noise.

—The god will only answer when I take an action convenient to the god.

Junko recalled what her grandmother had told her.

Power welled up within her. This power did not come from anger.

"Ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Junko cried out in joy.

"Y-young lady…" asked a worried ninja, but Junko turned a smiling face toward him.

"I will be betraying you all now!"

Junko easily drew the Sword of Sohaya. The blade shined with a strange rainbow-colored light.

"Justice and honor did not save us! And so I will live for the man I love! This betrayal is love!"

The ninja were shaken by that announcement and a commotion spread through them. Before, that commotion would have caused Junko to worry and hesitate to act, but it now filled her with confidence and energy. As the ninja saw this, they all chose to serve her.

"This is not a betrayal! We will do as you wish!"

Junko nodded as her heart trembled.

"Very good!"

And with the rainbow-colored sword in hand, Junko ran toward Eiko.

"Wha-!? Are you joining the demon king's side!?"

Eiko frantically began to fall back.

"Exactly! But I was able to draw the Sword of Sohaya when I decided to use it on you! You were not chosen by god!"

"B-but our god would never aid an ally of the demon king!"

"I am merely using our god! I have been given the power I need to cut you down! How I use that power afterwards is up to me!"

"Don't be ridiculous! You are alone while I have three hundred soldiers remaining who will do whatever I ask!" roared Eiko.

The Teruya ninja forces fell into a new formation with the armored warriors in the center. They were all either uninjured or already healed.

"Three hundred, you say!? That saves me the effort of counting!"

Junko held a hand in front of her chest and formed a sign.

"Ninja Art – Scattered Moonlight!"

This was Junko's special technique that created multiple versions of herself. As she ran, Junko split into two. And then both versions of her split into two as well.

"What!? You can do that!?" shouted Eiko.

The Junkos continued to double in number. After repeating the process several times, a great army made up of Junkos had been created.

"This is…three hundred!"

Three hundred Junkos rushed toward the Teruya ninja forces.

"Impossible!"

Eiko cowered down from the wind that blew by her side.

It came down to a single attack. The three hundred Junkos each defeated one of the three hundred powerful soldiers of the Teruya family in a single strike.

"It didn't even take one second!?"

"Of course not. None of them were strong enough to need a second attack."

All three hundred Junkos bared their teeth in a smile and surrounded Eiko.

Eiko looked around in search of something, but none of her troops could move.

"W-wait. We're old friends, right!?"

"Of course! And that is why I can never forgive you!"

The three hundred Junkos rushed at the single Eiko.

This time, Eiko had nowhere to run. Eiko was swallowed up by the approaching wave of Junkos, but Eiko was quickly knocked up into the air. To make it easier for the next strike, one Junko hit Eiko with the back of her sword such that Eiko was knocked into the air.

"Ohhh!"

Another Junko jumped up after her. She gave another strike with the back of her sword, hitting Eiko further up. The next Junko then jumped up after her.

Each time a Junko struck Eiko, that Junko would disappear.

Finally, only the real Junko was left high up in the air. She held the Sword of Sohaya in preparation to strike Eiko who had already lost consciousness. She was not going to strike with the back of the sword. She reversed her grip and held the front of the sword toward the girl.

"I will slice that life of yours in two!"

Junko swung the finishing blow down toward Eiko's abdomen.

But just as her blade was about to bisect Eiko…

The Sword of Sohaya let out a clang. It had been stopped by a right arm that had appeared in midair.

"Please wait."

Those emotionless words were accompanied by a hole opening in the air. Starting with the right arm, a figure emerged. It was Korone. While still holding the Sword of Sohaya back, she held Eiko in her arms.

"Korone…" muttered Junko with the malice gone from her mind.

"You must not kill her. She must live and make up for her crimes. I must ensure that happens."

Korone then brought Eiko down to the ground.

"Where have you been?" asked Junko as she followed Korone down.

Once she landed, Korone said, "I was deactivated, but your grandmother saved me. I have a message from her."

"What is it?"

"She will handle everything afterwards, so you can pursue whatever you like without worry."

Korone expressionlessly held out her hand and raised her thumb.

The sight was so ridiculous that Junko burst out laughing.

She also cried a bit. She wished she had simply done this from the beginning.

She wiped away the tears and saw a black dragon flying through the sky.

Junko and Korone watched it fly by.

"He never seems concerned about me."

"I do not think many girls would want someone like him concerned about them," commented Korone and Junko laughed.

"Heh. Then I suppose I should go after him."

"Please leave things here to me. I will start by arresting her."

Korone began handcuffing Eiko's unconscious form.

"Thanks."

Junko nodded and began walking toward he remains of the aircraft carrier to see if any means of transportation had fallen out anywhere.

Chapter 4: The Perfect Ending?

It was clear where Bouichirou was headed: the temple of Suhara. It was near the Kouga Village, so it was a long flight.

"I apologize for being unable to teleport there."

Peterhausen gave a rare apology with an admirable attitude.

"I can't force you past your limits. More importantly, this might be the end. Can you tell me everything you know?" asked Akuto sadly.

"Yes. This is likely the best time. The demon king is a human yet not a human. It is an existence created from a modification of a human's internal mana."

"I see. Then do I have parents?"

"You do have birth parents. You can rejoice over that. And I sympathize with you for being abandoned afterwards."

"Thanks. So are you saying the group known as black magicians created both you and me?"

"You could say that is the case…and you could say it is not. The reason for the gods gaining a will of their own is not fully known. However, we can make some educated guesses. It seems the complex network connections themselves gained this will. And the life that was created, the gods, had no sense of self and no lifespan. For that reason, it constantly wished to die. Yet you humans never realized this. And long ago, a certain man built the system known as the demon king. The demon king can kill the gods and allow them to rest in peace."

"Rest in peace?"

Akuto was confused by this unexpected term.

"That is the best way of explaining it in your words. They shall be given a sense of self and their will shall be eliminated from this world. It is a difficult concept. However, it may be easier to understand in terms of your world's story if you think of it as computers having a soul, too. This sense of self is given to them by the Law of Identity. That is an existence that forms a pair with the demon king."

"Do you mean Keena?"

"Yes. However, the Law of Identity and the demon king can be born any number of times. If things are not progressing well, the gods can kill them and wait another century. The gods have been repeating that process again and again."

"So the gods are just as selfish as humans."

"Don't say that. Anyway, I was created to maintain the system once the gods die. I have a sense of self. That L'Isle-Adam told you that a sense of self will gradually form if one has a body and a position, didn't she? If a god with a sense of self ruled the world, it would be filled with conflict just as before, but those conflicts would likely be filled with a sort of humanness. That is what the one who created me wished for."

Peterhausen seemed to be recalling the distant past as he spoke.

"Is that why you love fighting so much?"

"That is just what a courageous king is. Or you could kill the gods and become king yourself. That path is still open."

"Is that want you want?"

"If possible. But, master, do whatever it is you want. I have had enough fun. This has been one of the best rampages I can remember. Due to that wildcard named Yamato Bouichirou, it did not quite reach all-out war, but you are still the first to win."

"I see." Akuto let out a sorrowful sigh and continued. "Let me apologize ahead of time: I'm sorry."

"I do not know what exactly is going to happen, but you do not need to say the rest. I have a hunch where this will lead." Peterhausen flapped his gigantic wings. "Now, two powerful enemies await up ahead. We need to enjoy this!"

He waited alone up in the sky.

Brave's arms were folded as he awaited the demon king as bravely as his name would suggest.

As the two confronted each other, the first to give into the silence and speak was Hiroshi.

"Let me ask you again: why are you doing this?"

"That again? I will bring an end to the issues surrounding me. If that will reform the world, what's wrong with that?"

"What about those who do not want that change!?" shouted Hiroshi.

Akuto glanced down. A thick forest covered the ground, but a figure was visible in a slight clearing.

"If you are referring to that girl, I think I can handle that."

Hiroshi had left Yuuko waiting down below. When he realized Akuto had noticed, Hiroshi shook his head in displeasure.

"You are always like this! You accept things without telling anyone anything!"

"You would not understand even if I told you. This is enough. Let me past."

"Stop being so selfish!"

Hiroshi accelerated.

As Akuto prepared himself for a fight, Peterhausen spoke to him.

"How do you intend to win? He will use the mana canceller of his anti-demon king mode from the beginning. If that happens, this will not be easy."

"I just have to charge in. I'll finish this in a single blow," said Akuto carelessly.

Peterhausen was surprised.

"Oh? How reliable. Do you have a plan?"

"No. My only plan is to go in without a plan."

"If you say so. I will trust you."

Peterhausen grinned and then began accelerating.

Two oddly colored shooting stars collided in the sky. The flash of light lasted only an instant.

"No way!"

Hiroshi could not believe it. His right hand's high-frequency blade had dug into Akuto's left arm. And Akuto was pressing his right arm against the high-temperature plasma ball Hiroshi had used as a shield in his left hand.

Akuto had truly charged in without a plan. He had spread his arms and received both of Hiroshi's attacks.

"Gaaaah!"

But Akuto let out a cry. The mana canceller was returning his body back to that of a normal person. His left arm had been partially severed and was dangling down. It was spewing fresh blood. The portion of his right arm that had touched the plasma had been instantly vaporized. He continued to press forward with his right arm, so it looked like the arm was gradually disappearing.

The pain had to be unimaginable. Nevertheless, Akuto continued to move forward as if trying to embrace Hiroshi.

"S-stop this, aniki!"

Hiroshi let out a pained cry. He stopped his high-frequency blade and tried to get rid of the plasma, but the voice of the Brave suit's control computer reverberated within his visor.

<A foreign object has entered within the shield, so the plasma cannot be removed. Please release the shield.>

"It can't be…"

Hiroshi tried to remove the plasma ball from his left hand, but Akuto pushed forward with his right arm.

"P-please stop, aniki!"

Hiroshi reflexively released the plasma. A burning wind burst out and enveloped Hiroshi, Akuto, and Peterhausen.

"Waaaah!"

The Brave suit placed a shield around Hiroshi's body and Peterhausen's body was able to withstand heat even without mana, but Akuto was a normal human.

"Aniki!" screamed Hiroshi.

But Akuto's face remained directly in front of Hiroshi.

He had forced himself inside Brave's shield.

<Shield overload. Battery almost drained. Switching to life preservation mode. Thirty second recharge necessary before normal mode is available.>

That mechanical voice rang out.

Akuto grinned.

Hiroshi realized this was what Akuto had wanted even if it cost him most of his arms and the half of his body he had lost in the plasma explosion.

"I-it can't be!"

Hiroshi and Akuto fell intertwined toward the forest below.

"I knew you were not capable of cruelty. If I had you injure me to cruel levels, I knew you would hesitate. And that would forcibly drain your battery. That is how the system works."

As he fell, Akuto's body regenerated. It seemed he was able to draw in mana now.

"You're…You're horrible, aniki…" Hiroshi began to shed tears. "Why are you such a cruel person? You really are a demon king…"

"I know I can be cruel. If I do not return, please tell everyone how cruel I was."

"If you don't return?"

"Killing the gods is the end for me as well. That is what I mean."

Akuto placed a hand on Hiroshi's head. He squeezed and the Brave suit's helmet shattered.

"Wah!" cried Hiroshi as his face was exposed.

"I try to understand how you are right as well," said Akuto.

Then the two of them struck the ground.

"Uuh…" groaned Hiroshi.

He could no longer use the suit, so he should have struck the ground at full force, but Akuto supported him.

Akuto stood firmly on the ground and lowered Hiroshi.

Yuuko ran over and let out a short scream when she saw Akuto.

"Don't worry. He is alive," Akuto told Yuuko as she cowered down.

Hiroshi stood up and turned his face resolutely toward Yuuko.

"Eh?"

Yuuko looked surprised.

"I…never meant to hide it. It was a coincidence. But…I saw no reason to go out of my way to tell you…"

Hiroshi was flustered.

Yuuko then began laughing.

"Ah ha ha. You idiot. No matter who it was inside, you were cool."

When he saw that, Akuto began to walk away. However, Yuuko gave a start and stiffened when she saw Akuto move.

"I know. You cannot remain yourself while I am around."

Akuto raised a hand and called down Peterhausen.

"Wait!" called out Hiroshi. Akuto turned around and Hiroshi asked, "Why won't you remove the demonic beast mana from her body?"

"Because that mana's activity is being controlled by Suhara. If I interfered, it would put her in danger."

"But…that means…if the god dies!"

"I will…no, he will fill the role of the god afterwards."

Akuto pointed toward Peterhausen.

"Th-then, you intended to do this from the beginning? But…that will mean the demon king stands at the top of the world. Wh-what will you do then, aniki?" asked Hiroshi frantically as he was overcome by unpleasant thoughts.

However, Akuto muttered a complaint rather than directly answering.

"That is something that cannot be avoided. It is something I have to do."

Bouichirou entered the temple of Suhara. The unconscious shrine guards on the path behind him showed what resistance he had faced.

Bouichirou held Keena within the tranquil space in which Teruya Keizou had once carried out his duties.

"She is the Law of Identity."

"What do you want, one who has come to bind the Contract of the One with her?"

He heard voices. Two shrine maidens appeared from behind the god tree.

They were the L'Isle-Adams that supported Suhara. The two beautiful girls were dressed as shrine maidens, but they were armed. One held a naginata and the other held a bow.

Bouichirou laughed at the question.

"Do I even need to say it? I will take control of the gods. A god with a will of its own is unneeded."

When the two shrine maidens heard his response, they leaped to the left and right.

"In that case."

"We will stop you."

"It is too late for that."

Bouichirou tossed Keena up into the air and swung his arms sharply to the left and right.

Both shrine maidens stopped moving at the same moment.

Bouichirou gently caught Keena when she fell and began walking once more.

"Wait."

"The Law of Identity is meant to take our will and recreate the universe."

The shrine maidens spoke, but they could do nothing but speak. Their upper bodies had been severed from their lower bodies, so they could only lie on the ground.

"I know that is meant to prevent an invasion from another dimension and let you evolve to another dimension, but what good is it if you ignore mankind? The gods' method will destroy mankind."

"No, mankind will remain as data."

"The data has been saved to the quantum network and that network will overcome the dimension."

"I see no humans in that," said Bouichirou with a hint of annoyance.

He swung his right hand to silence one of the L'Isle-Adams.

"The gods will take the dead humans with them to some far place. That is a standard religious view. Mankind has wished for that for ages. We know this to be true," continued the other one.

Bouichirou shook his head.

"I do not object to maintaining that story, but that is all the more reason for the gods to not have a will of their own."

Once he arrived in front of the god tree, Bouichirou softly lowered Keena to the ground.

Keena was unconscious, but she sat motionless while leaning against his legs.

"Now, I know the gods cannot oppose the Law of Identity. Prepare the stage for the Contract of the One."

As Bouichirou spoke, the god tree began to split to the left and right.

A space spread out within. It looked as if wooden structures had been folded on top of each other infinitely. It was likely made with the special construction technology that used mana transfers. It was not actually infinite, but vermillion-lacquered wooden corridors were connected by plain wooden stairways like a labyrinth. It all looked like a complex network.

Keena woke and looked up at the corridors

"Ahh… You came here, didn't you!?" She let out a strange voice that sounded both absentminded and despairing. She held her hands together and turned toward Bouichirou. "Hey, please stop this! It's not too late!"

Bouichirou smiled awkwardly.

"Please listen," he said. "If I do not do this, humanity will disappear from this world."

"No! You are wrong! Your method will not escape the curse of irrepeatability!"

"Wha-…?"

Bouichirou finally found himself dumbfounded.

"Please imagine it! Imagine that the gods lose their will and mankind continues on to the age you came from. The path leading there may be different, but the outcome will certainly be the same. Someone will come to defeat you…yes, you. A human will become the demon king of their own will and come to kill you once you become a god. That is all that will change," said Keena.

Bouichirou felt something cold run down his spine. It was sweat. He perfectly understood what Keena meant. And knowing that, he trembled at the foolishness of his own actions.

"You were the sole survivor of mankind. And while bearing that last hope, you attempted to correct this foolishness. Given the position you came from, your actions are not based in pride. You are a true hero. But no matter how many times you try to redo it, the outcome will always be the same."

Bouichirou looked back at Keena's face.

Her expression was identical to that of Sudou Rimu, his former lover and the final Law of Identity.

"Why… Why isn't it me!?" Bouichirou cried out in anguish.

"Don't cry. You are…"

Keena began saying something, but Bouichirou stopped her. He wrapped an arm around her waist and tried to forcibly drag her into the god tree.

"No!"

"If the result will be the same, I can at least…"

Bouichirou tried to restrain Keena as she struggled, but he suddenly stopped.

He had seen someone else in the temple.

Keena turned around as well and saw the person. And when she did, her face lit up.

"A-chan!"

"Normally, this would be the time to say something cool, but the two of us have certain similarities. I understand how you reached such a pathetic situation, at least to a certain extent. For that reason, I will not say anything."

Akuto began walking forward.

Bouichirou let go of Keena and his expression grew refreshed as if he had given up on everything.

"I have always been troubled by the demon king, but this is the first time any of them has been like you."

"How sad. In the end, we are doing nothing but cleaning up after a system created by mankind. Then again, that could describe most any job."

"How ironic. After living for hundreds of years, it is only now that I find someone who understands me."

"That is because we seek similar things. But there is one definite difference between us."

"Yes, there is: Luck with women," said Bouichirou with a smile.

Akuto stared blankly back at him.

"Yes, I suppose my luck with women is pretty bad," commented Akuto.

"Ha ha. Now that is something very different between us. Now I have really come to hate you. The winner here can enact his plan."

Bouichirou raised a hand and pulled a giant sword out of thin air.

"In the end, I suppose that's our only option."

Akuto tried to step forward, but Bouichirou attacked without warning. His sword roared as it flew horizontally.

"Ohh!"

Akuto jumped back to avoid it, but Bouichirou mercilessly attacked again.

Bursting sounds were heard as the air was sliced apart and a portion of Akuto's body and clothes scattered through the air. Akuto had somehow avoided a fatal blow, but the arm he used to defend and the areas he had not been able to cover were not unharmed.

"So you have impudently learned to dodge!"

When they had first fought, Akuto had been able to do nothing more than guard, but now he could at least deflect the sword with his arm. Thanks to that, he avoided being knocked backwards, but he still could not retaliate.

"But you still leave too many openings!"

As he pointed that out, Bouichirou swung his sword horizontally at Akuto's feet.

"Uuh!"

Akuto was unable to react to this unexpected attack and collapsed to his knees.

"A-chan!"

Keena cried out and tried to move forward, but Akuto stopped her with a glance.

"A-…"

Keena stopped and gulped.

Akuto could not move. His knees had been completely smashed. He was in the process of regenerating them, but Bouichirou was showing no sign of giving him time to be able to stand up once more.

"It looks like the headmaster taught you a bit about how to fight," said Bouichirou as he swung up his sword to deliver the finishing blow.

"He did, but it seems I didn't learn Kakei properly."

Akuto shook his head in resignation.

"So you feign innocence even on the verge of death. Even so, I will take that as your last words!"

Bouichirou swung down his sword.

The blade accurately pierced Akuto's head.

No matter how much regenerative ability Akuto had and no matter how tough his body might be, this was not a strike he could withstand.

The large sword sliced Akuto in two.

…Or it should have.

"!"

Bouichirou was shocked by how odd the strike had felt.

The sword had stabbed into the temple floor, but it had sliced through Akuto's body at the same time.

"Tch!"

Bouichirou immediately abandoned the sword and jumped back.

Akuto was definitely there, but the sword had not affected him in the slightest. It was as if he were a hologram.

"It can't be!" shouted Bouichirou.

He had realized the real Akuto was standing directly behind him.

"Hahh!"

Akuto jammed his fist into Bouichirou's gut when the man turned around.

A shockwave shot out Bouichirou's back and he doubled over.

"I-impossible…" groaned Bouichirou while struggling to breath.

"Of the tricks I was taught, I can pull this one off pretty well," said Akuto. The image of him kneeling that the sword had sliced in two blurred and disappeared. "I created a mana screen and projected a reflected image there. It really is a cheap trick. The headmaster said you can only use it once in a fistfight and as long as it takes for your opponent to notice if they're using projectiles."

"I-I fell for such a stupid trick?"

"I hate falling for stupid tricks, too. I know how you feel," said Akuto, but he still punched Bouichirou again.

This time, Bouichirou's body bent without him uttering a word.

Akuto punched him yet again, but not out of anger or malice. As he continued to punch his opponent to keep him from moving, Akuto was filled with a feeling similar to sorrow.

Finally, Bouichirou passed out and collapsed.

Akuto lightly shook his wrist as if to say something was wrong.

And then he heard a calm voice.

"Demon king, it is time to bind the Contract of the One with the Law of Identity."

One of the collapsed shrine maidens was looking up at Akuto.

Akuto silently walked over to Keena.

"A-chan…"

She looked up at Akuto as well.

Akuto took her hand.

"This has become quite a big deal, hasn't it?"

"Yes, but it isn't over yet."

Akuto and Keena exchanged a glance and seemed to come to a silent understanding. They nodded simultaneously and turned toward the shrine maiden.

"We will not bind the contract."

"We can do that at any time later."

The shrine maiden seemed to panic despite being a L'Isle-Adam.

"I-impossible! Then why are you here?"

"I will kill the god here so everyone will understand! I will destroy this place and stop this god from functioning as a network terminal!"

As he spoke, Akuto reached a hand toward the sky above.

"Th-that is meaningless… Even if the terminal dies, the god itself is a will living within the network. This will only eliminate a portion of the functions and accumulated data that is known as Suhara. You will only cause chaos and-…"

"I know that." Akuto cut off the shrine maiden's explanation. "But doing this will wake some people up to the truth."

As he spoke, mana began to gather around Akuto. When he had first awoken, he had been unable to control his mana, and now he was planning to cause a pure mana explosion just as before.

"You might disappear as well. Is that what you want? What will that accomplish? That will change nothing," said the shrine maiden.

"No, it will change something. At the very least, it will end the story of the demon king's rebellion. And that will finally allow people to face the gods who have wills but no sense of self."

"I understand what you plan to do. Before you can do that, we will eliminate you and the Law of Identity. We will keep this incident in mind and hope for better results with the next demon king."

As the shrine maiden spoke, the temple began to tremble. This was not being caused by Akuto's mana waves.

"The defense system has activated. The god tree which acts as the terminal can now move as an individual unit."

The god tree which had been opened in the center of the temple closed once more. And that object which resembled a giant tree glowed with mana light and began to float.

The temple began to collapse. The structure had been built around the giant tree, so the roof crumbled and then the floor Akuto and Keena stood on began to crumble as well.

"Kyah!" screamed Keena.

Akuto held her in his arms. The area below the floor was not all that tall, but they could be crushed by objects falling from above.

"A-chan!"

Keena stopped Akuto and pointed behind them as he tried to jump up. Bouichirou was collapsed there.

"Understood."

Akuto nodded and grabbed Bouichirou's hand. That must have caused him to come to because he looked up. Akuto nodded toward the man's surprised expression.

"Let's go."

Akuto then jumped. He repeatedly kicked off the crumbling building materials and made his way up to the roof.

"Mankind still needs the gods. And the gods need mankind. I cannot allow you to interfere in the moment in which the two will join together."

The shrine maiden's voice eerily echoed up from below. Akuto looked down just in time to see the head of the severed upper half of the shrine maiden get dragged down by the crumbling floor.

"Kh…"

Akuto averted his gaze and looked up into the sky instead.

The floating god tree had already ascended a fair distance.

"Peterhausen!" he called.

In response, Peterhausen flew down from where he had been waiting in midair.

"This is our final job, isn't it!?"

"Yes. And this is my final request as your friend."

Akuto left Keena and Bouichirou below and mounted Peterhausen.

"Wait. Are you really intending to risk your life for this?"

Bouichirou pointed toward the god tree, but Akuto only faced forward.

"I am. I was born as an existence with a ridiculous goal. If I can act of my own free will in the very end, that's fine by me," replied Akuto without looking back.

"This may not change the outcome. It may be as I was told and this will change nothing and mankind will still be destroyed. Why are you so convinced this is what you should do?" asked Bouichirou.

Akuto instructed Peterhausen to take off.

"Because I have learned that being able to empathize with the people in your everyday life is more important than faith or some story far removed from your life. If I destroy this system, people will be able to face other people." He then turned toward Keena. "You were right, Keena. If everyone can eat rice together, we might just have world peace."

Peterhausen powerfully flew up into the sky, but…

"Rice!" cried Keena in a lovely voice.

"Eh?"

Akuto was confused by the change in Keena's attitude, but Peterhausen had already flown high into the sky. The god tree moved slowly, so they had already reached it.

But surprisingly, Keena flew up into the sky herself and pursued Akuto.

"A-chan, you can't! You can't make them answer to you!"

"Wh-what? Do you have a separate consciousness while you're the Law of Identity?" Akuto asked as Keena flew alongside Peterhausen, but she was not listening.

"A-chan, tell me what you're planning to do!"

Keena spoke bluntly to Akuto.

"Um, well… I'm going to charge into the god tree and transfer its functions over to Peterhausen. And then I'll destroy it," he answered.

Keena shook her head.

"You can't. You plan to die, don't you?"

Having it stated so plainly left Akuto unsure what to say.

"No, it isn't necessarily going to happen. It will certainly be dangerous and if I succeed in killing even one god, I will lose any place in society. So…"

"No! Idiot! Idiot! I won't let you!"

Keena violently shook her head.

But that was when Peterhausen let out a shout.

"Master, it is too late! We are going to charge into the god tree!"

"Then we have no choice. Keena, outta the way!"

Akuto shoved Keena.

She flew a good distance away from Peterhausen, but she was clearly not ready to give up. She began stripping off her clothes while flying and she vanished.

Now Akuto could not know where she was.

"…Let's go!"

However, Akuto could not change his plans.

Peterhausen fired a spiral-carved metal stake from his mouth which opened a large hole in the god tree's body. He then charged inside through it.

"The inside is a pseudo alternate dimension. We and our opponents have real forms, so we can take damage," warned Peterhausen.

Inside was the same wooden labyrinth seen when Bouichirou had opened the god tree. Their vision was filled with nothing but vermillion-lacquered pillars and bare wood corridors.

"Transfer over its function," instructed Akuto.

Peterhausen sent cables stretching in all four directions from various parts of his body. They all plugged into connectors located in the corridors.

"Once the transfer is complete, I will release those like Hattori Yuuko from the god's control. But the transfer will take some time. Until then…"

Peterhausen trailed off.

Akuto looked around and realized why.

Shrine maiden L'Isle-Adams appeared from all over the seemingly infinite corridors. They all had their doll-like eyes turned toward Akuto and Peterhausen.

"Those are real…right?"

Peterhausen nodded in response to Akuto's whispered question.

"These corridors look infinite, but the space in here is finite. And there may be a large number of L'Isle-Adams, but they are of course not infinite either."

But they were still at a severe disadvantage. Akuto had to protect Peterhausen who could not move. If even a single cable were severed, the transfer would be incomplete and Yuuko and other Suhara followers like her would be put in danger.

Naturally, the demon king and the gods were no longer cooperating. To the gods, Akuto and Peterhausen were foreign objects that needed to be killed.

"Dammit. Am I not going to be able to accomplish anything after making all those dramatic announcements!?" roared Akuto.

However, Peterhausen laughed heartily.

"Not yet. Just because I cannot move does not mean I cannot fight. Let us fight back, master. You may have said you would have nowhere to go afterwards, but you can always continue fighting until every last terminal of the gods has been destroyed!"

"Heh… That could work, too," muttered Akuto.

As if that had been their cue, the countless shrine maidens all rushed toward Peterhausen.

The shrine maidens swarmed Peterhausen like ferocious ants attacking their prey. Akuto flew around, trying to tear them off, but he had his hands full with the shrine maidens attacking him from behind. Their attacks showed no mercy and it was painfully clear they were strange existences that could not truly communicate with humans.

"Anyone who fights like this shouldn't be guiding people!"

Akuto's anger rose to the surface. His mana increased and a whirlwind appeared around him.

However…

"Gaaaaaah!"

Peterhausen let out a scream.

"What is it?"

Akuto looked over.

The wound caused by the aircraft carrier striking him was glowing.

"Oh, no…"

Akuto realized what was causing Peterhausen's pain.

The heavy burden of transferring over Suhara's functions, fighting, and Akuto's mana control had exceeded the limit of his ability.

"I can handle this! Do not worry about me!" shouted Peterhausen in a deeply pained but intensely courageous voice.

"But!"

"We were always planning to die, right!? We were determined to save everyone else while sacrificing only ourselves. Taking safety measures here would be too foolish! Master, I will remove the limiter on your mana control. That will lessen the burden on me and allow you full use over your power! But in exchange…"

"You can't guarantee my body will last!? Sounds fair to me!"

Akuto once more began focusing the mana in his body.

Once his body began glowing, the shrine maidens approaching him were knocked back by an impact.

"Ooohhhhhhhhh!"

Akuto was aware he could not control his mana. No matter how hard he tried, he could not stop the torrent of power or the rising emotion.

Akuto used that power to blow away the shrine maidens clinging to Peterhausen. The freed dragon cried out in joy over the absence of the obstacles.

"I have taken over Suhara's functions! I can now release the people from the god's control at any moment! We can blow away everything here without worry!"

But Akuto did not reply.

Akuto's body was producing tremendous heat. As he lay curled up and unmoving, his body gradually melted the floor and sank down. His tremendous energy was beginning to melt the pseudo alternate dimension itself.

"Wait… master! Master! Kh… I cannot restrain his power anymore!"

Peterhausen's expression showed confusion for once, but that confusion quickly turned to fear.

"To prevent further encroachment into the pseudo alternate dimension, the pseudo alternate dimension is closing in on itself!"

The corridors began to be crushed as they folded up into each other, one by one. The shrine maidens were mercilessly caught in the middle and were crushed by space itself. Nothing remained of them afterwards. Only nothingness was left.

The folding of space was approaching Akuto at tremendous speed.

"You need to release your power some way or another! Let it explode! If you do, you can blow away the god tree, pseudo alternate dimension and all!" cried Peterhausen.

However, Akuto was unable to move an inch. When he saw that, Peterhausen shook his head.

"…It must be too difficult."

"Hey, why is it so difficult?"

"Mana is controlled by one's emotions. My master is still afraid of releasing his power," replied Peterhausen before looking around to see who had asked.

"But he kept saying he was going to do it," replied the voice.

Peterhausen realized Keena was floating nearby while invisible.

"His will to reform the world is strong. However, he is bothered by the fact that he will be unable to take responsibility for the world afterwards. After all, he lacks the ability to construct a new world. …At any rate, you need to escape. You will be caught in the blast here."

"Then why aren't you escaping, Pe-chan?"

"I have a duty to just barely control my master's mana and the subsequent explosion. If I do, I can save him."

"Then will you die, Pe-chan?" asked Keena in surprise.

"I will. A dragon with the exact same abilities as me may be created later, but a dragon without the same history and sense of self as me will not be me."

"I don't want that! I don't like this ending! This is just the kind of ending boys like!" wailed Keena.

Peterhausen smiled kindly.

"Then go tell my master that he is wrong. Teach him that he can create something in the world after the story of the gods has been ended."

"Pe-chan…"

Keena appeared and stroked Peterhausen's head.

"Please take this. I apologize that it is nothing exciting."

Peterhausen willed one of his fangs to fall into Keena's hand.

Keena looked at it, nodded, and ran over to Akuto while holding the fang tightly in her hand. Akuto was producing a tremendous amount of light, but Keena easily entered within that light and heat.

As Akuto suffered, Keena's naked form gently embraced him and she whispered in his ear.

"Don't worry, A-chan. I will do my best to make sure everyone gets along for your sake."

Akuto opened his eyes.

And one of the gods was obliterated.

"Why did it end up like this?" asked Keena.

She had not been speaking to anyone, but she received a response.

"That is a difficult question to answer. It truly is."

Keena's eyes were closed. In fact, she was unconscious. She had not actually spoken out loud. So why had she received a response while more or less dreaming?

"Who are you?"

"I am me. I am the other you inside you," said the Law of Identity.

"The other me inside me?"

"Yes. I am the eternal me who will remain even if you die. I am the me that proves that I am me. It may be difficult to understand, but that is what it is. That is why there were people trying to kill you. Those who wish to use the eternal me planned to kill you in hopes that I would reside within someone more convenient."

"I see. I guess we both have it tough."

"Yes. It is quite tough."

They both smiled for a while.

"So what can you do?"

"I can do many things. But I may not be able to do anything."

"Which is it?"

"Who knows. Not even I know. However, I understand what you want to do, at least to a certain extent."

"Yeah. So can you do that?"

"Well, I think so. You grant the wishes of the two men who fell in love with me, right?"

"Yeah!" said Keena with an energetic nod.

"I will give true peace to the soul of the time traveler."

"What do you mean?"

"His true desire was happiness for the person I once was in the future. I will guarantee that for him. That is why he was attempting to control the gods."

"What about Bouichirou-san himself?"

"That is for him to decide. Will he settle down in some era or will he start all this anew in the next era?"

"No. I mean how will he know that this future person will be happy?"

"He must believe that it is true. Yes, Bouichirou-san must trust the boy who was chosen to be the demon king."

"Trust A-chan?"

"He took action to oppose his destiny in order to change the future. Bouichirou-san must trust that boy. And that is why only Akuto-san can truly guarantee peace for Bouichirou-san's soul."

"But A-chan is…"

"Yes. If nothing changes, Akuto-san will remain the enemy of mankind. He does not wish for that either. And so I will alter everyone's memories a bit…just a tiny bit."

"Everyone's memories?"

"Yes. I will merely make it so it was not him but another demon king that went on a rampage today. That small change will allow him the same life he has had so far."

"I wonder if A-chan will be happy about that."

"That is a good question. Living the same life he has had so far will also mean he must continue to fight. And an even greater destiny will await him!"

"A-chan will be fine," declared Keena confidently.

"That is good to hear. I have always been observing this world, but even I hesitated to give life to the system known as the gods. The flow of human history is so lovely you can simply get lost in it, isn't it?"

And then the conversation between the Law of Identity and Keena came to an end.

Fortunately, the equipment belonging to one of the airborne troops had survived unharmed. Junko had borrowed it to pursue Akuto. However, it had taken her a long time to find it, so she was very late.

As she flew, Junko had been shocked to see Suhara's god tree floating in the sky. As a Suhara follower, she recognized it right away and knew the situation was well out of the ordinary.

However, what she saw next was even more shocking.

The god tree exploded from within.

The explosion was likely visible from dozens of kilometers away. The god tree became a gigantic pillar of fire that seemed to connect the heavens and the earth.

Junko was at a complete loss for words.

No sight could have more obviously made one think of the death of a god. Next to the pillar of fire, a black dragon of smoke spread its black wings as if mocking everything around it. Junko knew Peterhausen, so she immediately recognized this as his silhouette, but those that did not know him would likely have seen it as a demonic image.

A ring of shockwaves spread out as if it would cover the entire land of the empire in an instant. The sound reverberated beyond the clouds.

"How could this be!?"

Junko landed to avoid the shockwave, but she still heard the thick trees around her creaking in the wind. She stabbed the Sword of Sohaya into the ground to anchor herself, but she would have been blown away had she not done so.

Even so, the explosive blast died down in a few seconds. Junko returned to the sky to check on the situation.

In that instant, she saw something strange. Something was rising into the sky from the center of the blast. It was a pillar of light made up of tiny particles. That light formed a thin cloud and spread as if to cover the entire world.

"What in the world happened?" muttered Junko without thinking.

She rushed to the site of the blast and found Akuto and Keena in the center of the crater.

"Are you two okay?"

Junko ran over to them and Akuto collapsed onto Keena.

"Wake up. Are you okay? I have so much I want to ask you. What did you do? And where did that Yamato Bouichirou man-…?"

Junko suddenly found herself dumbfounded.

"Ah! It's Junko-chan!" shouted Keena innocently. She squirmed, got up, and waved her hand. "Hiiii!"

"Eh?"

Akuto also got up and turned toward Junko.

"Y-you idiot!"

Junko blushed and started waving her hands around.

Akuto finally realized that Keena was naked.

"Wah! Wait a second…"

"Noooo!"

Keena embraced Akuto in order to hide her body.

"You idiot! How can you be so indecent!?" Junko removed the top layer of her uniform and threw it toward Akuto and Keena. She averted her gaze and said, "What are you doing at a time like this!? Do you have any idea what happened? The god exploded… The god tree that acts as the god's physical form exploded!"

"But you knew I wanted to do that," complained Akuto.

Junko turned around in shock.

"Th-then, this is…"

"Yes. Suhara is gone. Technically, only the data is gone, but this should bring it to everyone's attention that the gods are nothing more than a system. If this changes the world…" Akuto trailed off there. "But I suppose this makes us enemies. I'm sorry I couldn't keep my promise after what I said."

Junko blushed.

"Y-you mean…when you said you would…give me the attention I deserve? Y-you do not need to worry about that. I only said what I did because I was in an odd mood…"

"Even if you tell me not to worry about it, I still do. After all, this makes me a complete traitor. You must support the Hattori family, so forget about me and…"

Akuto trailed off again because Junko had suddenly grabbed his hand. Her head was lowered, but her grip was firm.

"D-do not say that. I announced to those in my family that I would cast aside my family for you. So…so…"

Junko raised her head and looked Akuto directly in the eye. Even Akuto could figure out what this meant and he gulped.

However…

"Can I take that to mean you agree with my ideals?" he asked. "I will give you the attention you deserve. I will listen to what you have to say and I will do what I can to ensure you do not lose your position in-…"

Before Akuto could finish, he was hit by the back of the Sword of Sohaya's blade.

"In the end, you couldn't do it, onee-chan," said a voice from behind them.

Yuuko and Hiroshi were walking toward them. Yuuko looked carefree and Hiroshi looked embarrassed.

"Wh-what are you saying, Yuuko!? I was not… Wait, are you okay?"

Junko's expression changed and she turned around.

Yuuko spread her arms wide.

"I'm perfectly fine. I feel even better than before."

She walked up to Akuto and nudged him in the side with her elbow.

"Forget about our family and do something about my sister. Okay, boss?"

Yuuko's tone was a teasing one, but Akuto and Junko were shocked.

"H-hey, are you okay touching him?" asked Junko with her eyes opened wide in surprise.

Yuuko tilted her head in puzzlement.

"What do you mean? He's the one who visited our house, right? You're the one that flew into a rage when he refused your engagement."

"F-flew into a rage…? Anyway, he is the demon king, so…"

The demonic beast mana may have disappeared from her body, but her mental reservations about him would not have disappeared. She might not feel a complete sense of rejection toward him, but she should not have been able to touch him so readily.

However, Yuuko's next words were even more shocking.

"The demon king? Yeah, he died in that explosion. Akuto-san fought as the academy's public morals officer and managed to defeat him, right? That was so cool. If you don't make your move, I might go for him myself."

Yuuko intentionally provoked Junko with her words and spun around on the spot while grinning. Junko and Hiroshi could only watch on with dumbfounded looks.

"D-does this mean…?"

With a look of realization, Akuto turned toward Keena. However, she only looked up at him with a grin while only wearing a piece of Junko's uniform.

"Akuto-sama! Ahh, you survived! Let us work hard and use this as our first step toward world domination!"

Fujiko's reaction to him had not changed. After secretly returning to the ruined academy, Akuto was being tightly embraced by Fujiko in front of the underground altar which was missing its most important item.

"S-senpai… Please let go. I may not have been aiming for world domination, but this has become very odd," protested Akuto.

"Very odd?"

Akuto explained how it seemed everyone's memories had been altered. This excited the researcher side of Fujiko. Despite still being wrapped around his arm, she began manipulating a mana screen to gather information.

"This has become very interesting. It is being said that a different demon king began that battle and that he died. From the comments I can see, no one thinks you are the demon king."

"Then I…"

Akuto's face lit up, but Fujiko gave a displeased frown.

"Please do not rejoice! The world finally, finally began to be reformed, but the demon king at the center of it all has been removed from everyone's memories!"

"Even if I am not in the center, the world was still reformed."

The joy of being freed put a huge smile on Akuto's face. It seemed public opinion was beginning to grow in the direction Akuto wanted. People were beginning to think that the gods were only a system and that religious worship allowed unjust control by those in power.

"No! Now is the time to stand up! You still have your power, don't you? Do not worry, Akuto-sama. I will make a proper man out of you! To start with, I will need to get you ready down here."

Fujiko suddenly knocked Akuto to the ground and climbed on top of him.

"Wah! Wait, senpai! You shouldn't-…"

"No, do not restrain yourself. No matter what the world may think, we have a duty to the post-reformation world! One of our duties is to quickly create an heir."

"Don't be ridiculous!"

"Oh ho ho ho ho! Do not be like that. Come on, come on."

Fujiko began groping Akuto's body, but she quickly stopped.

"Stop that."

Someone had punched her from behind. Neither of them had noticed anyone approaching and only one person could punch from a distance.

"This is part of the school. I won't allow any improper relations with the opposite sex."

Lily followed her stretched arm into the underground room.

"President…"

Akuto raised his head.

Lily showed a cynical smile.

"You've done it again. But what kind of trick did you use to alter everyone's memories?"

"I don't know. I can only think it was the work of some great power I am not aware of."

"Hmph. Fine then. This does not change my actions. Although, I should be busy rebuilding the academy for the moment."

Lily began to leave, but her gaze stopped on the altar.

"Hey, where did that jar go?"

Fujiko looked startled by the question. She then made an awkward confession.

"W-well… That rubber monster stole it."

"Is that true?" asked Lily frantically.

Akuto looked puzzled.

"What jar are you talking about?"

"It apparently contained a cultivation of your cells. I hope it won't be misused…but I doubt we will be that lucky."

Lily let out a sigh.

Chapter 5: The Foreign Transfer Student

—Now then, it's time for my new life.

Akuto awoke. He had checked the day before, and it seemed most of the students – that is, everyone but Junko, Hiroshi, Keena, and the others – did not remember that Akuto was the demon king. In other words, he had been freed from his previous life.

—My life goal may have changed, but I still want to study hard so I can reform society from within. Ahh, an oddly worriless morning is a wonderful thing.

"Good morning," said a voice from a shelf above his head.

Korone had spoken from her standard sleeping spot.

"Good morning. By the way, what happened to your job observing me?"

"The order no longer exists. At this rate, I will become a stray L'Isle-Adam. I could always ask Markt what to do, but sadly, that may mean we must say goodbye," said Korone plainly.

—I see. So it isn't all good.

"Tell me when you're going to ask. I don't want to have to say goodbye too suddenly."

"I will. I plan to remain like this for a while. I am the only L'Isle-Adam to notice the large scale data alteration, so I would like to investigate it for a bit."

"Okay, thanks."

Akuto opened his window and looked outside.

"Wow," he said without thinking.

The school building was half destroyed and the schoolyard was filled with holes. On top of that, the remains of the aircraft carrier were still lying around.

"I can definitely tell that fight was no dream."

He opened a mana screen and watched the news. Naturally, they were talking about the incident.

<The demon king who fought so fiercely at Constant Magic Academy went on to destroy the god tree that is the main body of the god Suhara.>

The news reported on the damage done, the effects the destruction of the god would have on the system, and the serious influence that would have on society. But most importantly…

<The demon king was killed in the process.>

—So they really do think that. It looks like this is all over.

Akuto finished changing while filled with a hint of sorrow and a great refreshing feeling. He walked outside and Keena soon ran up to him.

"A-chan, good morning!"

"Good morning."

Akuto nodded and looked toward Keena. She was acting the same as ever.

—It couldn't be…

He had suspected that she might have been the one to cause this. In fact, he was almost certain of it.

"H-hey, about yesterday…"

"Yeah, yesterday was rough!" said Keena innocently.

"Well… Yes, it was. But were you the one that did that?"

"Did what?"

"The changes to everyone's memories."

"That wasn't me. But it was me."

Keena's nonsensical comment left Akuto staring blankly at her.

"Eh? What…?"

"It doesn't matter. Everyone's fine, right? I haven't seen Bouichirou-san since then, but I'm sure he's okay. Ah ha ha."

Keena laughed and Akuto decided that a lot of things really did not matter.

"You're right. Everyone is fine, so it doesn't matter. At the very least, I don't need to think too much about it."

Another voice then called out to them.

"Hey, hurry it up. The dorm students have a health inspection before breakfast because of the turmoil yesterday."

It was Junko.

"Oh, Junko-san, about yesterday…"

"You idiot! Forget everything about yesterday! And why are you calling me Junko-san? Why are you starting to call me by my given name now?"

Junko continued to mutter complaints as she walked away from Akuto and Keena.

"Sorry, Hattori-san," apologized Akuto as he followed her toward the infirmary.

"N-no…um… If you want to use my given name, you can do so. Yes," said Junko without turning around.

"Th-thanks," said Akuto in honest gratitude.

"Y-you idiot. If you are not the demon king, I can approach you honestly. S-so, from now on…"

She trailed off.

"From now on?"

"D-don't make me say it!"

Junko avoided the question and they arrived at the infirmary.

—I see. If I am not the demon king, there is so much more I can do. Leaving the issue of marriage aside, I can at least study with Hattori-san's family.

As Akuto thought on that, his turn for the medical examination arrived. He only needed to sit in a chair and listen to an artificial spirit speak, so he continued thinking.

—And I won't have to worry about my demon king powers during class. It's sad, but Peterhausen is gone now.

<Demon king.>

—Right, the demon king. With that power gone, I can redo my education and…

<Demon king.>

—Right. And speaking of the demon king… Wait.

Akuto raised his head as he realized everyone around him was muttering amongst themselves.

Everyone was staring at him.

<It has been determined that he will become the demon king. There is no mistaking it. It seems to have been overlooked when he entered the school, but this examination uncovered it,> said the infirmary's artificial spirit, Yatagarasu.

"Th-the demon king!?"

"He's been reborn after a single day?"

"No, he must have been the demon king from the beginning."

"Ahh, and we were friends up until now. Come to think of it, he did have a cruel side to him!"

—W-wait a second!

Akuto's chair clattered as he hurriedly stood up.

The only one looking at him in the same way as before was Keena. For some reason, even Junko looked like she was about to cut him down.

"D-damn you! How many times must you betray me!? If you were not the demon king, I was even thinking I could share everything of myself with you!"

Junko was so worked up that she accidentally exposed how she truly felt.

Naturally, this caused a commotion among the other students.

"What!? He was toying with that straight-laced class rep!?"

"That's a demon king for you! How horrible can he be!?"

—W-wah! No… That isn't it!

"N-no. Please, wait everyone!" Akuto raised his voice. "In this context, the term demon king refers to the one who will destroy the system of society. You could also say it is another name for a god slayer. And we now know that it means nothing for an individual to be the demon king. Isn't that right?"

Akuto spoke articulately and without hesitation. For that reason, the other students listened to him, but the fact that it was so easy to listen to meant they fully grasped his argument.

One of his classmates asked, "But doesn't this mean you are objecting to the gods' decision?"

"Wait…no… That isn't what I meant. The gods are nothing but a system and they can be used for arbitrary reasons. Even so, I believe using that system is necessary for the sake of the future. However, I must support a path of gradually reducing the number of people using that system."

Akuto frantically tried to smooth things over. However…

"Isn't that the theory held by the black magicians?"

"So that's what he meant when he said it means nothing for an individual to be the demon king. Now that the demon king is dead, he plans to start a terrorist group."

Akuto truly started to panic now.

"No! You are all saying too much when you do not understand what the demon king is. The demon king is a human with modified mana that the gods themselves create so he can kill the gods. That means he is forced to take actions opposed to the gods, but that does not in itself mean that he must do evil or destroy the system of society!"

"He's started to contradict himself…"

"And isn't he a little too knowledgeable about the demon king?"

—Crap. That information hasn't been made public.

"Please wait! What I ultimately want to say is that the dead demon king has taught us that the gods are an illusion. And that means the demon king himself was an illusion as well. Look at reality! The gods are a system and I, the one telling you this, actually exist in front of you!"

Akuto puffed his chest out with pride.

Silence fell over the infirmary. However, that silence did not come from the crowd being impressed by Akuto's words.

—H-huh?

He looked around to find his classmates completely afraid of him.

"I get it… He's announcing that the demon king never really died."

"If the demon king from yesterday was an illusion… that means he isn't dead!"

—I-I feel like this has happened before.

Akuto felt a cold sweat on his brow.

And…

"Akuto! You always do such unnecessary things!"

Junko had drawn the Sword of Sohaya. It was no longer under the effects of Suhara, but it was still an item of tremendous power. Junko began striking Akuto with the back of that rainbow-glowing sword.

"Wah!"

Akuto blocked with his arms and focused mana in them. Yesterday, that would have been an easy task. However…

"Ee!"

"Eh? W-w-wah!"

Akuto could not control the power leaking form his arms and an explosion burst out.

—N-no… Something is wrong…

The cold looks everyone was giving him hurt. He had half-destroyed the infirmary and the entire school knew about him by this point. He had somehow made it to class, but even Mitsuko-sensei, his homeroom teacher and the school doctor, was giving him a cold look because of the damage to the infirmary.

"Let's see. A demon king has appeared in our class, so I think there will be a bit of confusion for a while. However, he has been allowed to stay in our class because he has yet to do anything evil," said Mitsuko-sensei as if complaining.

"I am the L'Isle-Adam sent as the demon king's observer. Please call me Korone. You may feel as if I was already a part of this class, but that is just your imagination," said Korone while standing beside the teacher's lectern and wearing a school uniform.

Akuto was fed up trying to say anything, so he just lay his head down on his desk.

But then Mitsuko-sensei continued speaking.

"Um, I apologize for interrupting during the confusion of gaining a new friend, but allow me to introduce another transfer student. She is a scholarship student from overseas. Please get along well with her. Come in, Keena-chan."

—A transfer student in the middle of all this confusion? I hope it's someone who won't be too afraid of me… Wait? Keena?

Akuto looked up.

A blonde girl with a cute and innocent smile walked in.

Akuto's eyes were glued to her.

But not because of her looks. A hair decoration with a bird design glittered in her hair.

—Th-that's the hair decoration I gave Keena when I left the orphanage.

Akuto stood up without thinking and the girl's gaze stopped on him.

"I-it's you!"

She ran past the lectern and all the way to Akuto's desk in the very back. She then wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Do you remember your promise from the orphanage? My name is Keena! I've wanted to see you for so long!"

The blonde girl going by the name Keena spoke with a foreign accent.

—Eh? There are two Keenas?

Akuto looked over at the red-haired Keena. She was sitting in her seat and was looking up at Akuto and the blonde Keena with a look of surprise.

"Ahh, I will never let you go, my darling!" said the blonde Keena.

Afterword

Thank you once again. This is Mizuki Shoutarou. I enjoy fishing, but lately I have been catching all sorts of fish I don't want. For example, pseudoblennius and half-lined cardinal. I torment the small fish and return them to the ocean. I will definitely never be allowed to go to Ryugu-jo. Of course, maybe it's best not to go there.

This is Volume 5. It is the second half of the two-parter. I would be glad if anyone who does not have Volume 4 would go buy it. If you read Volume 4 after this, you will feel like you have had the story spoiled ahead of time, so be careful. If you picked this up after seeing the cover, please search for Volume 4. It may be right next to this one.

This time, I'll switch things up by starting with the story.

You probably did not understand a lot of what Bouichirou said during his long lines, but you can take that as showing that guys who talk about nonsensical things are not popular with women. Don't ask about the popularity of the person who wrote the lines.

Now, then. This time, we reached a bit of a conclusion. I will not give any details for those who have yet to read the book, but let's just say this series will continue for a while longer. With this one thing and the other thing, there are still things left unresolved and I can think of various things to do from here on. And so next time will be filled with an extra helping of comedy. I think it will get back to being a proper school story and it will of course continue from this novel's ending.

Next, I will introduce the series' expansion into other media.

A drama CD will be released February 25, 2009 by Beatniks Inc. It has a splendid cast with Ono Daisuke-san as Akuto, Nakahara Mai-san as Keena, Shiraishi Ryouko-san as Junko, Chihara Minori-san as Korone, and Makishima Yuki-san as Fujiko. The drama is an alternate version of Volume 1's story and it includes a song by Nakahara Mai-san. That would be more than enough, but a special illustration by Itou Souichi-san is hidden below the CD jacket. Only those who buy the CD can see the illustration. It is quite amazing. In fact, it should be enlarged and printed on some sheets. To be blunt, it is erotic. It is so wonderful that some might even joke about why this illustration is under the jacket. It is a must see.

And Itou-san's manga is of course still running in Champion RED. Make sure to check that out as well.

Anyway, time to chat. The other day, I was eating with my editor and some people were speaking loudly about eroge next to us. I could not believe they were talking about eroge while eating and about a game that was released unfinished at that. I thought about giving them a warning, but I then realized we were eating in Akihabara. I of course did not give them a warning. Recently, that is a place where no one bats an eye at a maid walking around.

Now for my thanks.

First, my illustrator Itou Souichi-san. I went to Comiket, but I wasn't able to meet him because he had already left. And just as I felt I needed to make sure I could greet him next time, I saw a picture in Charano! of a Comiket cosplayer dressed as Keena! That's right. I didn't get to meet the cosplayer at our corporate booth either.

Next, my editor Ohashi-san. This time, the earlier than usual deadline allowed me to evolve and submit my manuscript a little less late than usual! Then again, I think it might have taken me just as long to write. Please stick with me next time, too.

Lastly, I need to thank everyone involved with the Drama CD. Thank you so very much.

Now, the next volume will be #6. As I said before, I will be writing about school events. There's still plenty left to enjoy!

References

1. ↑ Chinese martial arts term for neutralizing or controlling the direction of an opponent's attack. Known as Huajin in Chinese.

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